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PETER III
EMPEROR OF RUSSIA

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PETER III
EMPEROR OF RUSSIA

THE STORY OF A CRISIS AND A CRIME

BY

R. NISBET BAIN

Author of "The Pupils of Peter the Great," "The Daught Peter the Great," "Gustavus III." etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The present volume is an attempt to construct an authentic and impartial biography of the Russian Emperor, Peter III. Biographies of that unfortunate Prince abound, I know; many of these biographies in various languages I have made it my business to read: yet I think I may safely say that while not one of them can be regarded as authoritative or even satisfactory, most of them are obviously fictitious. The reason of this is not far to seek. First, the memory of Peter has been so absolutely eclipsed by the brilliance of the extraordinary woman who superseded or, rather, suppressed him, that to many people he is only interesting as the husband, the murdered husband of Catherine. His short life is a mere episode in her turbulent and dramatic career. In the second place, most of the memoirs relating to Peter are frankly polemical—either lampoons or apologies. While the friends of Catherine are obviously interested in representing Catherine's detested husband as a brutal, vicious, irresponsible despot, the friends of Peter, exaggerating his many amiable personal qualities and extenuating his undeniable absurdities, picture him, as simply and solely the victim of an ambitious consort and an ungrateful people. As usual the truth lies midway between these two extremes. Peter was notoriously unfit for ruling an Empire, but he would have made a good average eighteenth century *junker* or squire. His heart was good if his head was weak; although anything but a hero himself, he was capable of an exalted hero-worship; and a Prince who could conduct an orchestra and plan a library, should not in fairness be stigmatized as a mere idiot.

But a full and impartial life of Peter III. on modern lines must be very much more than a mere personal rehabilitation. The reign of Peter III. coincides with perhaps the most acute diplomatic crisis, not merely in the history of Russia, but in the history of Europe during the eighteenth century. I allude, of course, to the imminent collapse of the Prussian monarchy at the beginning of 1762, a catastrophe only and hardly averted by the enthusiastic devotion of the new Russian Emperor to Frederick the Great. This interesting and important subject, never, I will venture to say, adequately dealt with before, because Russia's share in it has hitherto been overlooked or disregarded, is sufficient of itself to justify an exhaustive record of the epoch-making events crammed into the brief six months during which Peter III., to his own hurt and harm, saved Frederick II. from apparently inevitable ruin.

Finally, there is the mysterious fate of the unhappy Emperor himself. Only of recent years has the thick veil which covers the tragedy enacted at the little country house at Ropsha been partially lifted. We still do not know precisely *how* Peter III. was done to death, but that he actually perished by violence there can now be no doubt whatever; moreover, the long debated question of Catherine's innocence or guilt can at last, in the light of recently discovered documents, be regarded as practically settled. For a critical estimate of the various documents relating to this history, many of which are now used for the first time, I must refer my readers to the bibliography which follows.

R. NISBET BAIN.

CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

(1) *Keith, Despatches.* Brit. Mus. MSS. 32,935; Bibl. Egerton, 1862; Brit. Mus. Add. 6825; Mitchell Papers, Vol. XXII; Brit. Mus. Add. 30,999. Most of these documents, still unprinted, are now used for the first time.

Keith, the English Ambassador at St. Petersburg, as the personal friend of Peter III. in the first six weeks of his reign, is an important witness during that particular period. His account of the Revolution is less satisfactory, but defective rather than erroneous. He is naturally somewhat biassed in Peter's favour.

(2) *Mercy d'Argenteau, Despatches.* Hist. Coll. of Imp. Rus. Hist. Soc., Vol. XVIII.

Mercy, the Austrian Ambassador at St. Petersburg, is an acute observer, and his despatches, written in cumbrously stately German, abound with the most minute particulars and the most piquant *aperçus.* He is antipathetic to Peter, and suspicious towards Catherine, but, considering his strong anti-Russian bias, wonderfully fair, and, so far as his information goes, very accurate.

(3) *Raumer, Beiträge zur neuern Geschichte. Theil III.*, Bd. 1.

Raumer's contribution consists, for the most part, of extracts from the despatches of the French minister, Breteuil, who does not impress one as either very accurate or very

acute. Much of his information, too, is obviously at second hand. Doubtless he had not so much secret service money at his disposal as his Austrian and English colleagues, and the course of events kept him away from Court during the whole of Peter's reign.

(4) *Herrmann, Geschichte des russischen Staats.* Bd. V., Abthl. 3.

This section of Herrmann is composed almost entirely, often verbatim, of the despatches of the Saxon Minister Brühl and his colleagues. Brühl is always lively and amusing. The *chronique scandaleuse* of the Court particularly interests him, and he has a rare quality of summarizing personal character epigrammatically. On the other hand, he is obviously credulous, and it is very hazardous to accept his unsupported statement of any fact.

(5) *Bolotov, Zapiski*

Bolotov represents the "man in the street" of the period. He is often inaccurate when he alludes to events beyond his ken, as, for instance, when he tells us that ex-Chancellor Bestuzhev was banished to Siberia, when, as a matter of fact, he was simply relegated to his own country house. But Bolotov was actually on the spot up to the very eve of the Revolution, and, if we want to know what St. Petersburg looked like in the days of Peter III., we could have no better guide than this observant, garrulous, inquisitive young Russian officer, who has something of the character of Pepys, and whose curiosity, overcoming his cowardice, frequently leads him into strange places.

(6) *Dashkova. Memoirs of the Princess Dashkow. Ed. Bradford.*

The Dashkova memoirs have long been before the world, and are always cited among the chief authorities on Catherine II. As an actual participator in the Revolution, the Princess cannot be ignored, but her testimony is vitiated (1) by her intense, irrational, partisanship, (2) by an all absorbing vanity, (3) by an absolute incapacity for weighing evidence wherever her sympathies or antipathies are concerned, (4) by a boundless credulity combined with singular lapses of memory. Mr. Keith, for instance, could not possibly have predicted the fall of Peter III., at the beginning of his reign, as recorded by Dashkova. Secy. Volkov was undoubtedly innocent of countermanding the Empress Elizabeth's orders, as she accuses him of doing. Her uncle, the Chancellor Vorontsov, showed nothing of that ancient Roman virtue with which she credits him when he deserted Peter III., etc.

(7) *Rulhière, Histoire en anecdotes sur la Révolution de Russie, l'année 1762.*

It is difficult to speak with sobriety of this scandalous and worthless document compiled by Rulhière, an *attaché* of the French Embassy at St. Petersburg during the Revolution, with the object of blackmailing the Empress at the author's leisure. Catherine's anxiety to get hold of the MS. is perfectly intelligible. It is saturated with vileness, and people in those days were not sufficiently well informed to perceive that the book was false as well as filthy. I now proceed to give five specimens of Rulhiere's veracity taken from his narrative of the Revolution. It is almost needless to add that they are absolutely unverifiable by facts. (1) His statement that Dashkova, whom he calls d'Aschekoff, was the mistress of Gregory Orlov at the same

time as Catherine. (2) That there were two separate and independent conspiracies on the eve of the Revolution, one conducted by Catherine and the other by Dashkova. (3) That Panin was "éperdument amoureuse d'Aschekoff," and sacrificed the right of his pupil, the Grand-Duke Paul, at her instigation. (4) That Panin (the mild and timorous Panin) actually reconnoitred the apartments of Peter III. at the head of a band of assassins! One might as well imagine Pickwick an assassin as Panin. (5) That the Emperor's barber sent a valet disguised as a peasant to warn him of the Revolution!—Moreover, Rulhière's account of the Revolution bristles with absurdities and contradictions, and he describes circumstantially the murder of Peter, not a single authentic detail in regard to which has ever come to light, his fiction only differing from the other apocrypha relating to the same subject by substituting poisoned *eau-de-vie* for poisoned Burgundy. Perhaps, however, the climax of absurdity is reached in his recital of how Catherine (whose actual complicity he leaves doubtful) first heard the news. Catherine, he says, was dining at St. Petersburg when Orlov: "échevelé, couvert de sueur et de poussière, ses habits déchirés, sa physiognomie agité, plein d'horreur," rushed in with the awful tidings.[1] It is so likely that Orlov, who, at any rate, was a ruffian of nerve and resource and took every minute and imaginable precaution to cloak the meditated crime and shield the Empress from the faintest suspicion, it is so likely, I say, that Orlov would betray everything after the deed had been successfully accomplished,

[1] For a full translation *see* App. I.

when all he had to do was to keep quiet! It is so likely that Catherine's guards would admit into her presence a ragged, dirty, disreputable-looking vagabond with the air of a madman or a drunkard! Had Orlov presented himself at the palace in such a plight, he would have been promptly arrested. Besides, we possess the letter[1] which Orlov actually *wrote* to Catherine, stating in the vaguest terms that Peter was no more, and this letter proves exclusively that the horror-stricken wretch expected little short of death at Catherine's hands, and durst not appear within twenty miles of her till he had been certified of her forgiveness and his own security.

(8) *Frederick II. Politische Correspondenz.* Vols. XXXI—II.

An invaluable authority, and for the most part posterior to Carlyle's masterpiece. We find here, too, almost the sole existing authentic letters of Peter III.

(9) *Mémoires de l'Impératrice Catherine II. Ed. Herzen.*

This enthralling, and, on the whole, singularly veracious book, is too well known to require any comment.

MONOGRAPHS

(10) *Solovev, Istoria Rosii,* Vol. XXV.

This monumental work, consisting as it does for the most part of a mass of original documents or excerpts therefrom, skilfully connected together and accompanied by a lucid and pregnant commentary, might be regarded as something more than a monograph. With the fear of the censor constantly

[1] *See* infra, pp. 170—171.

before his eyes, Solovev, a born critic and a most conscientious investigator, was almost forced to write his great history in this way. Quotation may pass when opinions, however cautiously expressed, might be erased by the red pencil which Russian writers fear so much. Any way, this great treasury of facts and documents is absolutely indispensable to all students of the period.

(11) *Glinsky, Tsarskiya Dyetui.*

This interesting book is valuable as containing the best extant account of Peter III.'s education.

(12) *Vasilchikov, Semeistvo Razumovskikh*, Vol. I.

Vasilchikov's history of the Razumovsky Family furnishes many important details relating to the Revolution, not to be found elsewhere.

(13) *Helbig, Biographie Peters des Dritten.*

This book is in many respects very untrustworthy. The author's description of Peter III.'s death is of course fictitious, and his account of the Revolution, though accurate on the whole, has evidently been touched up here and there for dramatic effect. Yet Helbig evidently took great pains to collect and sift evidence on the spot, and his book abounds with intimate details relating to the life of Peter, many of them apparently obtained at first hand. The book shows plainly enough that there was a good side to Peter's character, a fact almost universally disregarded, and reduces his *chronique scandaleuse* to very insignificant proportions.

(14) *Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie.*

This peculiarly able work, by one of the most eminent of modern Danish historians, makes use of the still unpublished despatches of Haxthausen, the Danish Minister

at St. Petersburg during Peter's reign, and thus throws much light on the Emperor's projected Holstein campaign, and supplies information previously unattainable.

(15) *Waliszewski, Le Roman d'une Impératrice.*

The cardinal defect of this piquant and attractive author, is his uncritical acceptance of conflicting authorities, and there is the less excuse for this fault as it is evidently due, not to ignorance, but carelessness. This is especially noticeable in his account of the Revolution, when Dashkova, Helbig, and even Rulhière(!) are freely quoted as if they were of great and equal authority, whereas very few statements by any of the three can be accepted without ample corroboration. In particular, his narration of the doings of Peter III. immediately before his arrest is little more than a *réchauffé* of stale and questionable *dicta*, while several essential facts are omitted. On the other hand, Waliszewski's views as to the death of Peter, if somewhat of a non-committal character, are quite unexceptionable. His book on the whole, cannot, however, be regarded as authoritative.

(16) *Bilbasov, Istoriya Ekaterinui Vtoroi.* Vol. i.

Bilbasov is the very antipodes of Waliszewski. He has nothing of the latter's charm of style, but he displays prodigious learning and more than German accuracy and thoroughness of research. By far the best existing bibliography relating to Catherine II. is set forth at the end of his first volume, and he has brought to the arduous task of sifting the enormous mass of raw material, a critical acumen of the highest order. I have mainly depended upon him for my account of the last fortnight of Peter's life. Moreover, as this somewhat compromising book was published in

London, the author is always free to express his judgment with perfect frankness. I have used the Russian (privately printed) edition of 1895, and all my references are thereto. Since I wrote the above lines a still fuller edition of this work, in twelve volumes, has begun to appear at Berlin, but Vol. I. of the 1895 edition is practically unaltered.

R. N. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	KIEL	1
II.	THE LITTLE GRAND DUKE	8
III.	THE YOUNG SPOUSES	24
IV.	THE NEW EMPEROR	34
V.	"THE KING MY MASTER"	53
VI.	THE NEW DIPLOMACY	76
VII.	"OUR DIVINE EMPEROR"	96
VIII.	PETER'S QUARREL WITH DENMARK	112
IX.	THE CONSPIRATORS	123
X.	THE CATASTROPHE	141
XI.	ROPSHA	163
	APPENDIXES	175
	INDEX	201

70899

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Peter III. (photogravure)	*Frontispiece*		
The Grand-Duke Peter	*Face Page*		19
The Grand-Duchess Catherine	„	„	21
The Grand-Chancellor Michael Vorontsov	„	„	89
The Princess Dashkova	„	„	135
Gregory Orlov	„	„	138
Catherine II.	„	„	144
Alexius Orlov	„	„	170
Catherine II.	„	„	173

PETER III
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CHAPTER I

KIEL

Birth of Charles Peter Ulric—Death of his mother—Charles Frederick, Duke of Holstein, his character—Military mania—Charles Peter Ulric's first promotion—Early education—Death of his father—Miserable childhood—Brutality of his preceptor, Brummer—Migrates to Russia.

On February 21st, 1728, the young consort of Charles Frederick, Duke of Holstein, was brought to bed of a son, who, on the following day, in the Lutheran church at Kiel, was christened Charles Peter Ulric. The names thus given to the lad were eloquent of his illustrious lineage. He was called Charles, like his father before him, after his paternal great-uncle Charles XII., ever the best, oftentimes the only, friend of the House of Holstein. He owed his second name, Peter, to his late grandfather, Peter the Great, while his third name, Ulric, was a compliment to his great-aunt, the actual Queen regnant of Sweden. The little gentleman, though he had in his veins the blood of heroes and empire makers, was but a puny creature at best, and Fate, who had such a strange and terrible destiny in store for him, was unkind to him from his very cradle: he lost his mother

when he was only ten days old. The young Duchess, who had been reared in the austerer climate of Muscovy, and was thought to be far stronger than she really was, while watching through an open window the illuminations in honour of the birth of her son, took a chill, and died three days later, in her twenty-first year. Her body was embalmed and sent back to St. Petersburg in the same frigate which had brought her, a sad and reluctant bride, to Holstein only a few months before. Contemporaries describe her as a pretty, gentle, studious creature, unusually well educated for her age, her savage father's darling, adored by everyone who had the privilege of her acquaintance, but especially beloved by her younger sister, Elizabeth, who, thirteen years later, was to ascend the imperial throne, and who, as we shall see presently, transferred to the son much of the affection she had felt for the mother.

The bereaved husband felt his loss all the more poignantly as its immediate consequence was serious financial embarrassment. Henceforward the ample if somewhat intermittent stream of gold which had flowed into the perennially empty coffers of the court of Kiel from the imperial treasury at St. Petersburg, ceased altogether, and Charles Frederick was left to support, with the limited resources of a poor principality, an establishment which would not have done dishonour to the wealthiest of monarchies. He maintained a splendidly equipped *Garde du Corps;* was waited upon by a whole host of pages and kammerherrn, and, in fact, kept a court far more brilliant than either his rank demanded or his means could sustain. Nevertheless, in justice to him, it must be added, that this costly and extravagant display

was not entirely due to the foolish pretentiousness of a petty German princelet striving to ape his betters. It was also a sort of dignified, tacit protest against the injustice of Destiny who had condemned him, the former companion of Emperors and the actual heir of kingdoms,[1] to a quite subaltern position amongst the potentates of Europe. He was indeed, in some respects, a man much to be pitied. All his life long he had been the football of Fortune. Driven from his native land by the Danes while still a youth, always either a fugitive or a pensioner, this disappointed pretender to a visionary crown had grown up a soured misanthrope. That he was peevish, obstinate, haughty and narrow-minded, we can well believe; that his unhappy overtaxed subjects paid dearly for their master's crotchets, we know for certain; yet there was a touch of nobility in the steadfastness which rejected every proposal to compromise his claims upon Sleswick and Sweden, whether accompanied by threats or promises. This solitary trait of firmness of character is distinctly reminiscent of his uncle, Charles XII., who considered it a point of honour in the days of his adversity to maintain a magnificent establishment, although while still the conqueror of kings and the arbiter of Europe his contempt for pomp had been notorious.

It was doubtless from his royal Swedish uncle, at whose

[1] He had for some years resided at the Russian court as the son-in-law of Peter the Great and Catherine I., the latter of whom at one time designated him her successor. As the last surviving male descendant of Charles XI., his claim to the Swedish crown, on hereditary principles, was indisputable and was only surmounted in Sweden itself by a domestic revolution and some bloodshed.

court he had been brought up, that Charles Frederick likewise inherited his love for soldiering, though, in his case, the military mania stopped short at drilling, reviewing, and other forms of mimic warfare. He inspired his little son only too soon with the same taste, and so effectually that what had been only a favourite hobby with Charles Frederick expanded into on overwhelming passion in the case of Charles Peter Ulric. We are told that the most terrible punishment which could be inflicted on the child was to board up the window of his room looking out on the parade-ground during exercise time, and, all his life long, he treasured up the memory of the day when, at a bound, he rose from the ranks to the dignity of a second lieutenant. The occasion of this joyous and memorable elevation was the Duke's birthday in 1737, when the tiny heir-apparent (he was then but nine years old) was on guard at the door of the *Tafelsaal;* for, in theory at least, the Holstein army was the most democratic institution in the world, every member of it, whatever his rank, having to start at the lowest rung of the ladder, the Father of the Fatherland arguing that only so could the officer learn to appreciate the hard lot of the common soldier. In the middle of the banquet then, Charles Peter Ulric was relieved of his duty, summoned to table, there and then promoted to the rank of a lieutenant, and took his place in triumph among his brother officers as a guest at his father's table.

Apart from soldiering, the lad's education was of a very indifferent description, not so much in consequence of the stupidity and brutality of his teachers, as because he was the victim, from the first, of two conflicting pedagogic

systems alternately and indiscriminately applied. As the nearest male relation of Peter the Great, he seemed at one time to have a fair chance of ascending the Russian throne and, accordingly, in the first instance, he received some instruction in the principles of the Russian language and the Orthodox Religion, and the Greek chapel, established at Kiel for the benefit of his mother, was retained for his use. But when, on the death of Peter II., the Muscovites, altogether ignoring the little Holstein Prince, elected Anne of Courland [1] as Empress, there was a bitter reaction at the Court of Kiel against everything Russian, and all the hopes of the needy Holsteiners were fixed upon Sweden, whose old and childless King, Frederick of Hesse, alone stood between Charles XII.'s nearest blood relation and the Swedish throne. Henceforth the Muscovites were ridiculed to Charles Peter Ulric as barbarians, and he received the education best adapted for a Prince who was expected, one day, to sit upon the principal Lutheran throne of the north. The method adopted in the case of Charles XII., whom the Duke imitated in all petty details, was followed as closely as possible, to the utter despair of the unfortunate pupil whose very limited intelligence was utterly unable to master what his highly endowed great-uncle had so easily assimilated. For Latin, in particular, he conceived such an enduring hatred, that years afterwards, when, as Emperor of Russia, he set about collecting a really fine library, he absolutely refused to allow a single Latin book a place on his shelves. With Swedish he was much more successful, and could, in a very

[1] *See* Nisbet Bain: *Pupils of Peter the Great,* Chap. V.

short time, not only read that language, but even translate easy passages out of it into German. French he had been taught almost from his cradle by the women in whose hands he remained till he was seven years of age. Though obstinate, he was always affectionate, and for his governess, Fraulein Alinius, in particular ("mamma" he used to call her), who ultimately accompanied him to Russia, and survived him, he always had a grateful affection.

On the death of his father in 1739, the position of the little Duke distinctly deteriorated. His nominal guardian was now his uncle Adolphus Frederick, Prince-Bishop of Eutin, memorable at a later day as the meek husband of Frederick the Great's termagant sister, Ulrica Louisa, and the ineffectual father of the last great King of Sweden, Gustavus III. Adolphus Frederick was an indolent, good-natured epicure, who loathed every sort of business which required the least mental effort, and practically he allowed his ward, and his ward's estates to take care of themselves. Under his somnolent sway, the revenues of the Duchy dribbled away inexplicably, and the little Duke was left to the tender mercies of a group of instructors many of whom had cultivated the amenities of life at Potsdam among the rough dragoons and the gigantic grenadiers of Frederick William I. of Prussia. Von Brummer, the Prince's governor, was a rough, quarrelsome, choleric martinet, who treated his sovereign like a dog, brutally ill-using him on the slightest provocation. His favourite method of punishment was to make the child kneel for hours on hard peas, till his little legs were red and swollen. As the Prince grew older, Von Brummer used to chastise him freely with a horsewhip,

occasionally alternating the discipline by placing him in a doorway with a fool's cap on his head, for the amusement of his own gentlemen-in-waiting as they sat at dinner. The other preceptors, his tutor Von Bergholtz, Pastor Hosemann who taught him theology, and Dr. Juel, a ridiculous pedant of the type familiar to us in the contemporary comedies of Holberg, who first inspired the Duke with his life-long horror of the Latin language, were, more or less, the obsequious tools of the bully Brummer. Even a vigorous intelligent lad would have fared badly in such hands, and to the little Duke, who was always morbidly timid and weakly both in body and mind, this savage and senseless regimen must have been a crushing torture; indeed, but for his military diversions, and even these Brummer contrived to curtail as much as possible, life must have been well-nigh insupportable. Fortunately, just before his 13th birthday, a great event occurred which enabled him to exchange this purgatorial discipline for what must, by comparison, have seemed a veritable paradise. On the night of Dec. 6th, 1741, his aunt, the Tsarevna Elizabeth Petrovna, at the head of the Preobrazhensky Grenadiers, overthrew the existing Russian government,[1] and the first thing the new Empress did, on feeling securely established on her throne, was to send for her nephew, her one remaining male kinsman, whom she had already resolved to adopt as her successor.

[1] *See* Nisbet Bain: *The Daughter of Peter the Great,* Chap. III.

CHAPTER II

THE LITTLE GRAND DUKE

Charles Peter Ulric in Russia—Kindness of his Aunt—His personal appearance—And feeble health—Education—Professor Stehlin and his kindergarten method—The cabinet of fortification—The bad-mark book—Indolence and frivolity—Lack of deportment—Elizabeth's anxiety on this score—Charles Peter Ulric received into the Orthodox Church as Peter Fedorovich—The Ceremony—Liberality of the Empress—Serious illness of the Grand-Duke—Finding him a bride—Arrival of Sophia Augusta—Her serious illness—The betrothal—The journey to Kiev—The wedding ceremonies—The Grand-Duke pronounced of age.

The removal of the young Duke from Holstein had all the suddenness and the secrecy of an abduction. The bearers of the Empress Elizabeth's letter of invitation were Baron Niklas von Korff, and his brother the Russian Resident at Copenhagen. The imperial offer of adoption was joyfully accepted by the Holstein Regency, to whom the prophecy of the late Duke, that his little son would one day restore the fallen fortunes of his house, seemed at last about to be fulfilled. The preparations for his journey went on apace, and not a soul in Kiel knew of the departure of the Duke till three days after he was well across the frontier. Travelling viâ Berlin in the strictest incognito, under the name of the Count von Dücker, with his two Hofmeisters, Brummer

and Bergholtz, in attendance, Charles Peter Ulric reached St. Petersburg in the beginning of January, 1742.

His reception at the Winter Palace was of the most touching description. The buxom good-natured Tsaritsa, whose strong affection for every member of her family, however remote, was one of her many amiable qualities, shed torrents of tears over the only child of her beloved and never-to-be-forgotten sister, and promised to be more than a mother to him. A thanksgiving service for his safe arrival was held the same day at the Court Chapel, whereupon aunt and nephew received the congratulations of the whole Court, and a round of festivities, crowned by magnificent illuminations, was held in honour of the auspicious event. Nevertheless, the delight of the Tsaritsa at this happy reunion was speedily dashed when she came to examine her newly found treasure a little more closely. The Duke's personal appearance was more peculiar than prepossessing. Extraordinarily pale and thin, with his lank blond hair combed straight down over his collar and profusely powdered in the so-called Spanish fashion, the odd little figure held itself as stiff and straight as a wooden soldier, with its narrow tiny head projecting a good inch in front of its body, and when spoken to Charles Peter Ulric responded in a queer jargon of broken French and German uttered with a strident squeak of piercing intensity. [1] The physicians, moreover, shook their heads over his fragile frame, while the great Dr. Struve, who had won a European reputation and was

[1] Bolotov, who often heard it in later days, says that Peter's voice could always be distinguished amidst the loudest din, and pierced the thickest doors and walls.

called in to patch up the little Duke as best he could, almost killed his Serene Highness outright by a too vigorous application of the fashionable Halle cure, then regarded as an infallible panacea. But doctors and the arctic severity of the weather notwithstanding, the Empress contrived safely to convey her nephew from St. Petersburg to Moscow in the depth of winter, and his first birthday in Russia was celebrated with extraordinary pomp and solemnity. On this occasion Peter was nominated lieutenant-colonel of the Preobrazhensky Guards, a dignity his father had held before him, as well as Colonel of the Cuirassiers of the Body Guard, the veteran Field-Marshal Lacy, the last surviving military hero of the preceding reign, being enjoined, in his capacity of Lieutenant-Colonel of the same corps, to report to the little Duke every morning, and receive from him the countersign for the day.

But it was the question of her nephew's mental equipment which occupied the Empress most of all. Elizabeth herself was no scholar. She regarded literature in general as injurious to health, and always attributed the premature death of her sister Anne to her excessive bookishness. At the same time she held it to be the duty of Sovereign Princes to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their subjects, and she was determined, anyhow, that her heir should not be behind the rest of his royal and imperial cousins in knowledge and learning. All the Russian Ambassadors abroad were commanded to search for and send to Moscow the best procurable pedagogic systems of the day, but the one finally adopted was of native origin, being the work of Professor Stehlin of the Imperial Academy of Sciences at

St. Petersburg. Stehlin was one of the many Germans who had made their fortunes in Russia during the reign of the semi-teutonic Tsaritsa Anne. He is described by a contemporary compatriot as a man of many elegant accomplishments, and his "Anecdotes of Peter the Great" is still of some value as an historical document. The Empress was so pleased with Stehlin's project that she paid him the compliment of declaring that he who had devised such a plan was alone capable of putting it into practice. She herself introduced him to his august pupil with these words: "I see that your Serene Highness has still a great many pretty things to learn, and Monsieur de Stehlin here will teach them to you in such a pleasant manner that it will be a mere pastime for you." At her request the preceptor then proceeded to examine the Duke in her presence, when it came out that the lad was incredibly ignorant in every branch of learning. French was the one thing he knew passably well. Stehlin seems to have been a good teacher. His pedagogic system anticipated in many respects the kindergarten system of a later age. He soon discovered that while his pupil was amazingly childish for his age, delighting above all things in playing for hours with tin and wooden soldiers, and so flighty that it was difficult to fix his attention for any length of time, he, nevertheless, had a phenomenal memory, and a veritable passion for everything relating to the theory and practice of warfare. The tutor regulated his plans accordingly. Everything was made as easy as possible for the pupil, and while the boy's natural preferences were largely humoured, as much miscellaneous information as possible was adroitly conveyed to him indirectly. Books

full of plans and pictures, especially those relating to the military art, were largely employed, as well as a number of miniature mathematical models, with the aid of which Stehlin demonstrated rudimentary science to his charge. The history of Russia up to the time of Peter the Great was expounded by means of old medals and coins, and the Duke was given an excellent idea of the geography of the country he was one day to rule by means of the huge secret folio volume known as "Sila Imperii," containing elaborate plans and profiles of all the fortresses of the Empire from Riga to the Turkish, Persian and Chinese frontiers, with full explanations of their position and environment. The four-and-twenty volumes of the "Galerie agréable du Monde," which Stehlin borrowed from the library of the Academy, were also of great assistance to the tutor in riveting the attention of his pupil. Twice a week, Stehlin read to the little Duke extracts from the foreign Gazettes, pointing out at the same time, on a chart or a globe, the positions and boundaries of the various countries mentioned. At a later stage the Grand Chancellor Bestuzhev was ordered by the Empress to supply Stehlin with extracts from despatches and other diplomatic documents, so as gradually to familiarize Charles Peter Ulric with current affairs. When the Prince was tired of looking at books, or poring over plans, Stehlin would take him for a walk in the palace gardens, and casually direct his attention to the trees and flowers, giving him, at the same time, some elementary notions of their structure and variety. In wet weather the rudiments of architecture were inculcated in much the same way. Thus, after explaining to the Duke, by means of plans and sections, the construction of his own

apartments, Stehlin would proceed with him all over the palace and point out the salient features of the various halls and rooms. When at Moscow, they would often make the tour of the Kremlin together. Moreover, to encourage her nephew in his studies, the Empress presented him with a curious and unique gift—the so-called Cabinet of Fortification. This was a huge mahogany bureau containing four-and-twenty drawers. These drawers were full of wooden models of every shape and size, illustrating minutely and exhaustively the science of warfare, but especially poliorcetics from the times of the Greeks and Romans to the middle of the 18th century. All these models could be taken to pieces and put together again according to printed directions. Elizabeth took the keenest interest in her nephew's progress. Once, when paying her usual morning visit, she found him on the floor so busily engaged in chalking out the plans of a fortress as to be quite unaware of her intrusion. The Empress remained standing in the doorway, watching him for some time in silence, then approaching and embracing him, she observed: "I cannot express in words the pleasure I feel when I see you employing your time so well. It makes me think of my poor father, who, on a similar occasion, while watching your mamma and myself at our studies, exclaimed with a sigh: 'Ah! I would give a finger of my right hand to have been instructed in my youth as I ought to have been.'"[1]

This was all very well, but the *Censuren-Journal* or Bad-mark book, which Stehlin was obliged to keep, had another and

[1] For account of Elizabeth's own early education, *See* Nisbet Bain: "*The Daughter of Peter the Great,*" Chap. IV.

very different tale to tell. Peter was never tired of technical drawing or of copying profiles from plans by Cohorn, and we have his teacher's word for it that he drew them very nicely; but anything requiring the slightest mental exertion, the slightest effort of thought, revolted him instantly. Only with the utmost difficulty could he be persuaded to listen while Stehlin read history to him. Most often he is reported as "utterly frivolous" or "altogether unruly." His other teachers had the same complaints to make. Two hours every day, from eight to ten, he was supposed to go through a course of theology, under the guidance of the hieromonath Theodorsky, to prepare him for his reception into the Orthodox Church; but though he learnt to gabble the orthodox formularies glibly enough, he secretly prided himself on being a Lutheran at heart, and, in fact, always remained so. Russian he was taught by Isaac Veselovsky, but he hated the language from the first, and took no pains to learn it grammatically, and though, thanks to his excellent memory, he could soon speak it fluently, he made a point of speaking it as seldom as possible. Four times a week, too, he was taught dancing and deportment by a Frenchman named Laudet. On this head the Empress was almost as particular as on the score of religion. A consummate dancer herself (we possess the testimony of Catherine II. that Elizabeth was the most graceful and majestic lady at her own Court), the gawkiness of her dear nephew was always a sore trial to her, and, in order to improve his manners and give him an easy carriage, she insisted upon his constant attendance at all the assemblies and ceremonious court balls which were such a prominent feature of the earlier part of

her joyous reign. But although this polite discipline lasted over sixteen years, the Duke, to the end of his life, could never enter a room with aplomb or cross it with dignity, and, at a Court were there was more of good dancing than at any other Court in Europe, he never got beyond walking though a quadrille.

The Empress's laudable but ineffectual efforts to civilize her nephew unfortunately occupied much time that would have been better employed if devoted to more serious studies. It is unfair, however, to blame Elizabeth Petrovna, as some have done, for being the chief cause of her nephew's ignorance. It must be remembered that the lad, naturally flighty and feather-brained, had no systematic training till he came to Russia, and he was then over thirteen, a difficult age to teach. Stehlin did what he could and gained the confidence of his pupil, which was something; but, though he had the nominal charge of the youth for three years and a half, that is to say from his arrival in Russia in January 1742, to the attainment of his majority in June 1745, nevertheless, owing to frequent and unavoidable interruptions, the Duke was under Stehlin's actual control for only seventeen months of that time. The first of these interruptions was due to the preparations for the reception of the Prince into the Orthodox Church.

It was on Nov. 18th, 1742, that Charles Peter Ulric was formally received into the Orthodox Church, at the Court Chapel of the Kremlin, by Ambrosius, Archbishop of Great Novgorod, and Stephen, Archbishop of Pskov, with great pomp and ceremony. At 10 o'clock in the morning, the Imperial party arrived at the Chapel, and took their places

on the right-hand side of the choir, opposite the Tsarsky Dvory, or Gates of the Sanctuary. After the chief Secretary of the Senate had read the manifesto declaring his Highness successor to the Russian throne, the Prince, led by the Empress, advanced to a desk on which lay the Cross on an open copy of the Gospels, and, speaking in Russian, in a loud clear voice, abjured all doctrines contrary to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, and recited the Orthodox Creed. A venerated cross, containing a most precious relic, a portion of the veritable clothing which Christ had worn upon earth, was then bound round Peter's neck, never again to be unfastened. The archbishop of Novgorod then dipped the anointing wand of pure gold into the receptacle of the Holy Chrism, a gem-encrusted jasper bowl of fabulous antiquity, and anointed the Duke therewith, whereupon all present came forward and offered him their congratulations. Then, after a threefold prostration, Peter was communicated, and congratulated a second time, upon which occasion the whole Court took the oath of allegiance to the Grand-Duke Peter Fedorovich, as he was henceforth to be called, as heir to the Russian throne. The Empress, who had followed the whole ceremony with the liveliest emotion, not infrequently directing her nephew what to do, as, for instance, when she guided his hand to the cross while he was taking the oath of abjuration, quitted the Cathedral during the final chants, in order to prepare a pleasant surprise for the new Grand-Duke. For, on his return to his apartments, he found them all completely refurnished in the most costly style, and a golden platter on his dressing-table held a draft in his favour, on the imperial treasury, for 300,000

rubles (£75,000). Very shortly after his Serene Highness had thus become an Imperial Highness, a deputation from the Swedish Riksdag arrived at Moscow to offer him the succession to the Swedish throne.[1] The Empress informed the deputation, somewhat tartly, that she had other views for her nephew and intended to keep him for herself, and the Duke himself, at the command of his aunt, refused the proferred crown. But he did so, we are told, very ungraciously, and, at the public audience, showed his ill-will in the most unmistakable manner. This, indeed, was the first symptom of that strange, unaccountable and ungrateful dislike of the country of his adoption which was to have such fatal consequences in the future.

At the beginning of 1743, the Court was back again at St. Petersburg. Peter learnt more in the following six months than at any other period of his life. In October, however, his studies were again interrupted, this time by serious illness. For some time previously, his preceptors had observed a strange languor in their pupil, and one day, when he was about to lie down, he fainted away in Stehlin's arms. Only with the utmost difficulty did the doctors succeed in saving his life. Not till the middle of November could he leave his bed, and even then he had to keep his room for another four weeks. His studies were now suspended indefinitely, and

[1] This was a political measure on the part of the still dominant Hat Party in Sweden, to save themselves from the consequences of the disastrous war which they so heedlessly had declared against Russia. The Hats hoped that the offer of the Swedish crown to the Grand-Duke would induce the Empress to waive her claim for territory against Sweden.

at the end of January, 1744, he again accompanied his aunt to Moscow, where the more equable climate and, a liberal allowance of exercise in the open air, enabled him to recover his usual feeble state of health.

He had scarce risen from what had well-nigh been his death-bed, when his aunt set to work to find a suitable bride for him. The whole subject was anxiously debated in the Senate. The Chancellor, Count Bestuzhev, was, for purely political reasons, in favour of the Princess Mary of Saxony; but Bestuzhev's enemies proposed, instead, Sophia Augusta Frederika of Anhalt Zerbst, the candidate of Frederick of Prussia who feared, above all things, a matrimonial alliance between Poland-Saxony and Russia. Pressure was therefore brought to bear on the Court of Dresden by the Court of Berlin, in consequence of which the Elector represented to the Tsaritsa that, *even for the sake of a great temporal advantage*, it was not permitted to a Catholic Princess to change her religion. The Empress was much flattered by this indirect compliment, especially as it was accompanied by the insignia of the White Eagle, at that time accounted equal in dignity to the Garter and the Golden Fleece, for "the nephew and appointed successor of my best friend," as his Polish Majesty politely phrased it. Almost simultaneously arrived a portrait, by the celebrated Peene, of the little Princess of Zerbst, with which the Empress and her nephew were equally well pleased. At the end of February, 1744, the Princess herself, accompanied by her mother, arrived at Moscow. The guests, on their arrival, were at once conducted to the bed-chamber of the curious and impatient Empress, who embraced them with effusion.

THE GRAND DUKE PETER FEODOROVICH.

The bride-elect, a shrewd, piquante, observant, preternaturally precocious little creature of fourteen, who had already made it a rule of conduct to please everyone worth pleasing, easily won the heart of the good-natured Elizabeth. Great pains were taken with the religious side of her education. Vasily Adadurov was appointed her instructor in Russian, and the Grand-Duke's confessor, Theodorsky, expounded to her the dogmas of the orthodox faith. Sophia Augustina astonished everyone by the keenness of her intelligence and the ardour of her application. In ten days, she had learned enough Russian to be able to converse with her spiritual father in that language. Then she gave the whole court a great scare. In order to master the difficult idioms of the Slavonic tongue as rapidly as possible, the little Princess used to get up in the middle of the night to con her tasks for the following day, and, as her rooms were kept at a very high temperature, she would frequently kick off her slippers, and walk bare-foot for hours, repeating her exercises aloud. The consequence was that she contracted a severe attack of pleurisy, and, for a month, the girl's life hung upon a thread. But the Empress herself nursed her through it, scarcely quitting her bedside the whole time, and, after hovering between life and death for three weeks, she slowly began to recover. Yet, even in the throes of what might have been a mortal illness, Sophia's tact and adroitness did not desert her. During an interval of ease, her mother suggested that she should see a Lutheran pastor. "No," replied the girl. "I should prefer a talk with my Confessor, Theodorsky." These words were, of course, repeated to the Empress, as Sophia intended them to be, and

won her the favour of the whole Court. At last on April 21st, 1744, her 15th birthday, the little Princess, long and lean, as thin as a skeleton, deadly pale and minus a good deal of her hair, was able to appear in public again, with the aid of a ronge-pot furtively conveyed to her by the anxious Empress. On July 8th, 1744, she was received into the Orthodox Church, under the name of Catherine Aleksyeevna, with great pomp and ceremony. The Princess repeated her confession of faith, on her knees, in Russian, clearly and distinctly, with a faultless pronunciation, and moved many to tears by her devout attention to every ceremonial detail. On the following day, Peter and Catherine exchanged rings of betrothal in the Uspensky Cathedral, and a Ukaz was read in which, for the first time, Catherine was designated orthodox Grand-Duchess. From July 26th to Oct. 1st the Court migrated to Kiev. During the course of its wanderings, the Grand-Duke, who had been suffering from fainting fits all through the summer, was attacked by small-pox, and his life was, for a time, in danger. The Empress, despite the warnings of the doctors, insisted upon nursing her nephew herself, and her prayers and tears were at length rewarded by his recovery. But he was now more rickety than ever, and so hideously pock-marked that his *fiancée* could scarce endure the sight of him. No sooner was he fairly on his legs again, however, than the Empress hastened on the wedding, which took place, at St. Petersburg on Aug. 21st, 1745. Early in the morning, the bride, in a *déshabillé* of white and gold, was escorted to the parade chamber of the Empress who helped to attire her in a richly embroidered costume of cloth of silver. Her Majesty

THE GRAND-DUCHESS CATHERINE.

then added all imaginable embellishments in the shape of jewels, with just a touch of rouge to show off the girl's fine complexion: but the young lady was permitted to wear her beautiful, lustrous, dark brown hair powderless, and many considered this her chief ornament. Then the Empress, having first arrayed herself in chestnut-coloured robes of unexampled splendour, proceeded to the Cathedral in an immense old-fashioned conveyance, more like a castle than a coach, drawn by eight horses, with the young people by her side. Mass recited, the officiating archbishop approached the throne, and, making a low obeisance, asked for the Ukaz permitting the marriage, which having received, he returned to the Sanctuary, followed by the Empress holding the bridegroom by one hand and the bride by the other. Then the archbishop, supported by the other prelates, came forth from behind the curtain, carrying gold coronets, which were placed upon the heads of the young couple. The Gospels having been read, the archbishop exchanged and blessed the wedding-rings, whereupon the Empress also blessed them, and passed them on to the spouses. When the ceremony was over, the young people threw themselves at the feet of the Empress, who instantly raised and embraced them with transport. The wedding was followed by a great banquet at Court and a state ball which lasted only an hour and a half, after which there was a procession to the nuptial-chamber—the Empress bringing up the rear. The appearance of Elizabeth in the nuptial-chamber was the signal for the gentlemen to withdraw, and, on their departure, the doors were closed, and the ladies of the Court proceeded to disrobe the bride. Catherine was then

arrayed in, to quote an eye-witness, "the most magnificent *déshabillé* conceivable", while the impatient Empress hastened into the antechamber to expedite her nephew, who was preparing for his nuptial couch with the assistance of the Grand Equerry, Court Cyril Razumvosky. Her Majesty speedily brought the young gentleman back with her, and the bashful spouses, after receiving her Majesty's benediction on their knees, were ceremoniously put between the sheets in a huge and sumptuous state-bed, under a canopy of poppy-coloured velvet hung with garlands, and adorned with hymeneal emblems. Early on the following morning, the Empress sent for the Grand-Duke, and gave him, for his bride, two superb toilet sets, one in emeralds and the other in sapphires, a prayer-book printed in very large type ("to save your eyes, my dear," as the Empress subsequently explained), besides other costly gifts. A crowded reception followed at eleven o'clock, and the following ten days were given over to festivities of all sorts, not even the common folk being forgotten, for oxen stuffed with game and poultry were roasted in all the public squares for their entertainment, and all the fountains ran with wine at the expense of the Empress's privy purse, so that anyone who had a mind thereto could drink himself into oblivion.

Two months before his marriage, Peter had attained his majority as Duke of Holstein, and it was therefore held to be indecorous to keep any longer in leading strings a Prince who was a reigning sovereign, and a husband into the bargain. Stehlin was accordingly dismissed just at the time when his ministrations were most necessary, but Prince Vasily Repnin, whom Catherine describes as a man of honour, probity and

esprit, was placed by the Grand-Duke's side as general adviser, while the great Chancellor Bestuzhev himself drew up, in the name of the Empress, a set of directions [1] for the guidance of Mr. and Mrs. Choglakov to whom the care of the young spouses was primarily committed.

[1] *Instruktsy dlya lits naznachaemuikh sostoyat pri Velikoi Knyeginye i pri velikom Knyazye* (Instructions for the persons attached to the service of the Grand-Duke and the Grand-Duchess.) *Arkh. Vor.* Vol. 2.— For an epitome of these patriarchal "Instructions," which give us a curious and interesting picture of what was expected of an orthodox Grand-Duchess in those days, *see* "*The Daughter of Peter the Great*," pp. 188—190.

CHAPTER III

THE YOUNG SPOUSES

Childishness of the Grand-Duke—His favourite pastimes—Domestic life of the young spouses—Peter's indiscretions—Madame la Ressource—Oranienbaum—The Grand-Duke's establishment and military pastimes—Catherine's literary pursuits—The Empress desires the consummation of the marriage—Birth of the Grand-Duke Paul—Rupture between the consorts—Peter's mistress, Elizabeth Vorontsova—Peter's philo-Prussian views alarm the Russian statesmen—Mortal illness of the Empress Elizabeth.

Such an union between a Prince, who, physically, was something less than a man, and mentally little more than a child, and a Princess of prodigious intellect and with an insatiable capacity for enjoyment, was bound to end in a catastrophe; but it is a great mistake to suppose that this *mariage de convenance* was a whit more miserable than such alliances usually are. The oft-repeated fable that Catherine was the victim of a brutal and vicious husband, who habitually neglected and ill-used her, has no foundation in fact. Each member of this forced partnership, as soon as he and she fully grasped all the inconveniences, but also all the opportunities, of the situation, proceeded, with the tacit consent of the other, to go his and her own way, observing just enough of the outer forms of decorum to save appearances and satisfy the elastic conventions of an easy-going volup-

tuous court. Besides, as they were little more than boy and girl at the time of their marriage, it took them five years fully to realize that their tastes were divergent and their tempers incompatible. Catherine, moreover, in the short-lived period of her first innocence, had even some vague dispositions towards religion, and she has confessed that if her husband had really desired to be loved she would not have found it difficult to love him, provided only that he had been endowed with a little common-sense. It is pardonable, perhaps, to regard this confession with some incredulity, yet one must needs admit that the Grand-Duke was so little of a man that it is difficult to imagine him the object of a tender passion. He was no profligate, no drunkard, as his wife and her partisans subsequently represented him to be. He was anything but brutal or tyrannous, as he has so often been painted, indeed if there is one fact about him more certain than another (except, perhaps, his congenital cowardice) it is the fact of his inexhaustible good-nature, a quality in which his charming wife, for all her studied bonhomie, was altogether deficient. Nor could he even be called stupid, in the ordinary sense of the word. Stupidity is too solid and substantial a quality to be attributed to one so essentially flighty and feather-brained as the Grand-Duke Peter. What he most resembled was a wooden manikin set on wires, perpetually agitated by some capricious and eccentric motive power. Never for an instant could he keep still. When he was not rushing about from place to place, he would always be shifting from leg to leg, thrusting out his tongue, making faces, and incessantly gabbling about whatever came uppermost in his mind, no matter where he might be. As his

wife said, he had about as much discretion as a cannon shot. On the very first day of their acquaintance, he confided to his young *fiancée* that he was in love with Mademoiselle Lopukhina, "whom," said he, "I should like to have married instead of you, only, as my Aunt wishes me to take you, I am quite resigned to my fate." "I listened blushingly to these family details," says Catherine, "but, at the bottom of my heart, I was astonished at his impudence and want of judgment." A fortnight *after* their marriage, he informed her that he was enamoured of one of her maids-of-honour, Mademoiselle Carr, and shortly afterwards confessed to a weakness for the crook-backed Princess of Courland. Perhaps it is needless to add that these boasted liaisons were, after all, nothing but the vapourings of a poor half-crazy creature who would fain be taken for a lady-killer. They meant nothing, and could mean nothing, for we have Catherine's own word for it that her "dear husband" was quite incapable of being "amiable" to any woman, herself included. Yet, fool as he was, he still had sense enough to see that his little spouse was his best counsellor, and he paid her one of the sincerest compliments she ever received, when he surnamed her "Madame la Ressource." In all his doubts and difficulties, he would come rushing up to her as hard as he could pelt, and having got her opinion, would bound off again as impetuously as he had come. At first, too, she was the chosen playmate of his favourite games which were of an incredible, an appalling childishness. No sooner had Madame Krause, Catherine's lady-in-waiting withdrawn for the night, than the Grand-Duke, with a cunning grin on his wizened little face, would

produce a large box of toy soldiers, which, during the day, he kept hidden beneath the bed of his wife, whom he would compel to play with him until one or two o'clock in the morning, till he felt inclined to go to sleep. "Methinks," archly observes Catherine, after narrating the incident, "methinks I was good for something else." Once when Catherine entered her husband's cabinet, she was astonished to perceive a dead rat hanging up on the wall. On enquiring the meaning of this singular sight, Peter gravely informed her that the rat had committed an offence against military discipline worthy of the severest punishment, for he had scaled the walls of the cardboard fortress which Peter had built on the table, and devoured a couple of doll sentries actually on duty on the ramparts. And at that time the Duke could not have been less than eighteen years of age! What wonder, then, if the lively intelligent Princess was no inexpressibly bored by the "unparalleled insipidity" of her husband's society, that after an hour or so of it, the dullest of books seemed, by comparison, "the most delicious of entertainments."

In the summer the young people spent a great part of their time at the country Château of Oranienbaum, 25 miles from St. Petersburg, which had been built by Peter the Great's favourite, Menshikov, greatly improved by the famous Marshal Munnich, and finally bestowed by the Empress Elizabeth upon her nephew as a summer residence. There Peter was able to indulge his taste for mimic warfare to the top of his bent, and this time with real, live, flesh and blood soldiers, instead of with puppets of wood and lead. As reigning Duke of Holstein, he held a sort of

motley Court at Oranienbaum, which was arranged on an entirely military footing, and every penny of his by no means inconsiderable income (which was very largely supplemented by the generosity of his Aunt), was spent in embellishing and enlarging this establishment. He added to the Château stone barracks and stables, and a wooden theatre in which he gave concerts every Sunday afternoon, he himself playing first violin in the orchestra with infinite gusto and no small skill. He also had a good broad canal constructed all the way from the grounds of the Château to the sea. But what delighted him above all at Oranienbaum was a toy fortress designed and executed, under his directions, by an engineer officer. This fortress had double walls which could easily be scaled; cannons were planted all along the ramparts, and, limited as was its area, it contained all the appurtenances and accessories of a real fortress. In the middle of this fortress stood Peter's stone house, a two-storeyed building, but built in a noble style with a very fine facade. The upper storey contained four fair-sized dwelling-rooms, including a small but elegant cabinet, tapestried throughout with blue atlas which Catherine herself had embroidered with little figures and emblems in silk. Here Peter lived at his ease, surrounded by his Holstein officers, most of them, unfortunately, men of low origin and coarse tastes, all day long drilling, reviewing and manœuvring his little army, which he gradually increased to 5000 men, while the evenings were given up to smoking parties, interminable military discussions, or sheer horseplay. Catherine also built herself at Oranienbaum an elegant little twelve-roomed château, where she also could gather her friends around

her. Although the petulance and impatience of the Grand-Duke afforded the Grand-Duchess frequent pretexts for quarrelling, all of which, being naturally pugnacious, she eagerly welcomed as so many pleasing excitements, and although, at last, their continued bickering was scarcely restrained even in the presence of the Empress herself, there was, as yet, no open rupture. Catherine made a point of visiting her husband for an hour or two every day in his apartments at Oranienbaum, and advised him as to the proper administration of his Holstein domains. It was at this period that Catherine sought and found a noble diversion in the companionship of her books. An omnivorous reader, she first of all went through a course of romances, but soon tiring of fiction, she, under the useful direction of the accomplished Swedish Ambassador, Count Gyllenborg, a most invaluable mentor, began selecting her literature with a little more method, and soon could boast an intimate acquaintance with the principal French and German masterpieces of the day. History, however, was always her favourite study, and she was to show, at a later day, a rare genius for interpreting its meaning and applying its lessons practically. Poetry and art, except so far as they ministered to the enjoyment of life, did not appeal to her at all, but philosophy, especially when presented in an elegant, agreeable, and not too abstruse a form, served her in the place of religion, and what morality she had is obviously borrowed from the Encyclopædists.

Meanwhile the Empress was by no means satisfied with the general behaviour of the young couple. They had now been married more than five years, and the long and eagerly

70389

desired heir to the throne, who was to have consolidated the dynasty, had not yet made his appearance. Elizabeth at first attributed this default to Catherine's excessive love of riding, when she, generally clad in male attire, bestrode her steed like a man, a practice she had learnt from her Aunt. But when Madame Choglakova, the Grand-Duchess's Oberhofmeisterin, began whispering mysteriously to Elizabeth that there could be no effect without a cause, the indignant Empress held a council of matrons in her private apartments, in order thoroughly to sift the affair, when, after severely rating Choglakova and her husband as a couple of boobies for allowing themselves to be hoodwinked so long by a couple of children, her Majesty *commanded* that an heir to the throne should be forthcoming *within the next twelve months*. In what way the imperial will was carried out it is difficult to decide, though details, mostly of a scandalous kind, abound, and Catherine in her mocking, cynical vein of drollery, half insinuates that she was allowed *carte-blanche* in the selection of the father of her future child. Suffice it to say that, to the manifest astonishment of the Grand-Duke, and the unconcealed delight of the Empress, Catherine, on the 1st October, 1754, was brought to bed of a fine boy, subsequently christened Paul. The child was instantly and absolutely appropriated by the Empress who, after rewarding the mother with a gift of 100,000 roubles, carried little Paul off to her own apartments, and ever afterwards kept him there. Scarcely for a moment could she endure to have him out of her sight.

It is a significant fact that, immediately after the birth of the Grand-Duke Paul, even the show of courtesy and good-

will which had hitherto been kept up for the sake of appearances between the consorts, was abruptly abandoned. Peter henceforth addressed his wife as Madame la Grande Duchesse, and, unfortunately for himself, no longer sought her advice in his difficulties. The result was disastrous. He shut himself up more and more with his Holstein officers, and lost no opportunity of ridiculing and disparaging everything belonging to the country of his adoption which he was one day destined to rule. It was about this time too, partly out of mere bravado, partly from vanity, and partly, perhaps, as a hint to his wife that she was not indispensable, that he chose for himself a mistress in the person of Elizabeth Vorontsova, the one ugly and stupid member of an exceptionally handsome and gifted family. This lady was the eldest daughter of Count Roman Vorontsov, and the niece of the Grand Chancellor, Count Michael Vorontsov. Her two younger sisters, the Countess Buturlina and the Princess Dashkova, were, at a later day, to astonish and delight half Europe by their beauty, wit and originality, while her two brothers, Alexander and Simon, were to rise to the highest rank among Russian statesmen. But Elizabeth Vorontsova, if stupid and sulky, was at least warm-hearted and affectionate, and the Grand-Duke, who had no fear of a snubbing in her society, loved her with all his heart. Moreover, what lent additional piquancy to the liaison was the fact that in this delicate affair he had exercised his own judgment for the first time; hitherto, if we are to believe Catherine, she herself had practically selected his nominal mistresses for him.

Hitherto Peter had been carefully excluded from all participation in politics. In 1749 indeed, he had, by command

of the Empress, taken his seat in the Senate, and, during Elizabeth's illness in 1756, he had even, as nominal President of the Council of Ministers, issued decrees and signed public documents. But a most careful watch had been kept upon all his actions, especially since Russia's consistent anti-Prussian policy had drawn her into the vortex of the Seven Years' War, for the Grand-Duke's notorious sympathy with Frederick II. was already one of the standing griefs of the Russian nation, and the despair of her statesmen. So long as the naturally shrewd and intensely patriotic Elizabeth was still on the throne, no danger was to be anticipated from the Grand-Duke's unfortunate predilection; but in the course of 1757 the Empress had an apoplectic seizure, for some weeks hovered between life and death, and, although her magnificent constitution enabled her to rally and even recover something of her former vigour, she was manifestly no longer the woman she had been. This unfortunate *contretemps* brought vividly home to all the Russian ministers what had long been apparent to the ablest and most audacious of them. Three years previously the Grand Chancellor, Alexius Bestuzhev, much perturbed at the prospect of a future sovereign whose first act would doubtless be the reversal of the whole policy of his predecessor, had secretly proposed to supersede Peter in favour of his son, the Grand-Duke Paul, with the Grand-Duchess as Regent. A miserable palace intrigue, secretly manipulated by the French and Austrian Ambassadors at St. Petersburg, had, in February 1758, driven Bestuzhev from power,[1] and his pusillanimous

[1] *See* "Daughter of Peter the Great," Chap. X.

and incompetent successors were content to drift along with the stream of circumstance and leave the rest to chance. Their one remaining hope towards the end of 1761, was that the physicians of the sick Empress might contrive to prolong her life for at any rate twelve months, by which time it was hoped the most dangerous of their difficulties would have been surmounted. For it was a fact patent to all the diplomatists of Europe, that the ambitious and disquieting King of Prussia was now at the end of his resources, and that another campaign must inevitably bring him to the ground. Frederick himself frankly admitted in private that the end was at hand, and had arranged his plans accordingly. The prize for which Russia had striven so strenuously during the last five years was at last well within her grasp, and she had only to stretch forth her hand to seize it. If only the Grand-Duke could be kept out of his inheritance for a few months, even his insane enthusiasm for the Prussian King would, it was argued, be impotent for harm, and Russia would reap the harvest of a ruinous expenditure of blood and treasure. But it was not to be. After rallying once more in the beginning of December, 1761, Elizabeth Petrovna, towards the end of the same month, had a serious relapse, and on Xmas Eve (O. S.) all hope of saving her was abandoned.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW EMPEROR

The death-bed of Elizabeth—Her efforts at reconciliation—Scene in the antechamber—Intrigues of the Vorontsov-Shuvalov clique—Its chief members—N. Trubetskoi—A. I. Glyebov—N. A. Narishkin—D. V. Volkov—A. P. Melgunov—I. L. and R. L. Vorontsov—Peter Shuvalov—Peter III. proclaimed—The homage of the Guards—Rewards and promotions—The amnesty Ukaz—Return of the political exiles—Peter's reforms—Reduction of the salt tax—Emancipation of the nobility—Abolition of the secret Chancellery—Recall of the Raskolnitsi—Proposed erection of a golden statue in Peter's honour—Extraordinary energy and diligence of Peter—Apprehensions of Count Mercy—The Ukaz confiscating Church property—Peter's projected Church reforms—Violence to Archbishop Sechnin—Causes of Peter's contempt for the Orthodox Church.

At midnight, January 4th, (N.S.) 1762, the long bed-ridden Elizabeth Petrovna was seized with violent convulsions followed by such prolonged and copious hemorrhage, that it seemed to her terrified attendants as if physical dissolution would anticipate death itself. Towards morning the dying Empress obtained some relief, but her exhaustion was extreme, and the same three physicians who on the last day of 1761 had pronounced her out of danger, felt constrained to warn their illustrious patient that she had now but a few more hours to live. The Empress who had had all a voluptuary's dread

of death so long as there was still a faint hope of life, now faced the inevitable with something of the courage which had enabled her, twenty years before, to seize the throne by a midnight *coup d'état*. Her first act was to summon her confessor and receive the last Sacraments of the Church, then having reconciled herself with God, she bethought her of those whom she was about to leave, and sent for her successor, the Grand-Duke Peter, and his consort, the Grand-Duchess Catherine. It was the first time that the imperial consorts had met for many months, and the Empress, only too well aware of their painful and disreputable differences, after ordering everyone to withdraw except Secretary Olsufiev, did her utmost to bring about a complete reconciliation. In especial she was very urgent with Peter that he should have in future a tender care for the helpless little Grand-Duke Paul. The child was very dear to her, and the uncertainty of his future, between a mother who already hated, and a father who scarce acknowledged him, embittered the last moments of Elizabeth. She next exhorted the Grand-Duke, by the memory of her past kindnesses, to do no harm to Alexander Razumovsky, to whom she had secretly been married, or to Ivan Shuvalov, the favourite of her later years. She also charged him, "as he would answer for it before the Almighty," to bear no malice against anyone for any past wrongs or grievances, real or imaginary, and to treat all her old servants and dependants as faithful if humble friends. The Grand-Duke took the words of his aunt and benefactress much to heart. On his knees before her bedside, he tearfully promised that her last wishes should be observed, and he religiously kept his promise.

And if the dying Empress had been surrounded by honest, courageous and disinterested counsellors, something might have been done to secure the continuity, and reap the ripening fruits, of the foreign policy which she had so steadily and so victoriously pursued. She herself felt the necessity for prompt and effectual action, for, shortly before her decease, she sent for the highest dignitary in the realm, the Grand Chancellor Michael Vorontsov. This man had been the friend of a life-time, and she knew him to be both honest and upright; but her partiality had blinded her to the fact that her old comrade was too timid to be perfectly straightforward, and now, in her extremity, he failed her. Word was brought her that the Chancellor was too unwell to come to her. It is true that he had long been ailing, and it is a fact that he was actually confined to his bed, yet there can be little doubt that not illness, but the fear of offending the heir to the throne, induced Michael Vorontsov thus to desert his benefactress in her hour of need.

In the antechamber outside, where a motley mob of courtiers, domestics, guards, ecclesiastics, and great officers of state, had been brought together by a common grief too grievous to be restrained, two veteran statesmen, both of them pupils of Peter the Great, both of them men of character and courage, both of them capable of giving wise and salutary advice, had the opportunity presented itself, were to be seen flitting about like pale shadows. These last Petrine survivals were Prince Jakob Shakovsky, whose financial ability, rigid economy, and austere probity had so materially aided Elizabeth's Government to meet the ruinous expenses of a five years' war, and the famous diplomatist,

Ivan Ivanovich Nepluyev, who had made European politics the study of a lifetime, and, as Ambassador to the Porte, had for fifteen years rendered invaluable service to Russia. But the presence of these two faithful old public servants in the antechamber, whence at any moment they might have been summoned to the bedside of the Empress was very distasteful to the little clique of self-constituted wire-pullers who, at that very moment, were engaged in shaping the destinies of the Empire, and consequently both Shakovsky and Nepluyev, while the Empress still lingered, were ordered, in the name of the Grand-Duke, to withdraw till all was over. This order came not indeed from the Grand-Duke himself, but from a small chamber separated by a couple of corridors from Elizabeth's dormitory, in which secluded spot Senator Prince Nikita Trubetskoi and General Alexander Ivanovich Glyebov, seated behind high desks, were actually in secret consultation with the known or suspected adherents of the heir to the throne, whom they summoned in one by one and then dismissed again after a great deal of rapid note-taking and mysterious whispering. Trubetskoi, a bloated, rubicund, gouty little old man, after narrowly escaping the gallows at the hands of Münnich, and banishment at the hands of Bestuzhev, had contrived to elbow his way into the Senate, of which he was now the President, and into the *Konferents*, or Cabinet Council, where the principal affairs of state were transacted. His only anxiety now was to preserve, and, if possible, increase, his influence, but, his talents being mediocre, he was content to be the humble servant of the Vorontsovs, the men actually in power, and of the Shuvalovs who had overthrown Bestuzhev and

hoped to control the coming Emperor who was personally attached to them. Glyebov, also a protégé of the Vorontsov-Shuvalov clique, had already risen high, but hoped to rise still higher. He was a pleasant-spoken, easy-going, excessively reserved man of fifty, who knew how to make himself agreeable, and was determined to go with the stream. Equally expectant and energetic subalterns of the same party, although, at present, they kept carefully in the background, were Lev Aleksyeevich Narishkin, Dimitry Vasilievich Volkhov, and Aleksyei Petrovich Melgunov. Narishkin, already Master of the Horse, was a sort of unofficial court jester who had long ago endeared himself to the Grand-Duke by his perennial gaiety and inexhaustible buffooneries. Melgunov, on the other hand, is described by most of the foreign ministers as a sinister scoundrel of repulsive physiognomy and shady antecedents, with an itching palm and an invincible weakness for low intrigue. Although a full general, he had never distinguished himself in the field, his speciality being the drilling of cadets. By far the ablest of the motley camarilla was Volkov. During the Seven Years' War, he had been Secretary of the Cabinet Council, and had made himself indispensable by his skill in drawing up rescripts and despatches. Before his appointment as Secretary, he had been under a cloud for applying public funds to the payment of scandalous private debts, but the insinuation of the Saxon Minister that, during the reign of Elizabeth, he sold state secrets to the King of Prussia at fancy prices, is absolutely false, and under Peter III., we shall find him bravely doing his duty under exceptionally difficult circumstances. Several impecunious or disreputable patricians were also attached to

the Vorontsov-Shuvalov party, chief among them being Ivan Larionovich and Roman Larionovich Vorontsov, the two brothers of the Grand Chancellor, who based their hopes of preferment not so much upon his influence as upon the encouraging fact that Elizabeth Romanovna, Ivan's niece and Roman's daughter, was the openly avowed mistress of the coming Emperor. The real wire-puller in these secret machinations, however, was the bed-ridden Count Peter Shuvalov, the most astute, ingenious, and unprincipled of all the Ministers of the dying Empress, who had reduced intrigue to a fine art, and still snatched convulsively at power though the hand of Death was already upon him. There can be little doubt, I think, that Trubetskoi and Glyebov received their inspirations from the crafty arch-schemer, and the result was, at least in this first instance, eminently satisfactory to all concerned.

The Cabal had not adjusted its combinations a moment too soon. Close upon four o'clock, when Glyebov was actually closeted with the Grand-Duke, and receiving his final instructions, the Empress expired. Trubetskoi, as the senior Senator of the Empire, thereupon threw open the folding-doors between the imperial dormitory and the antechamber, announced the tidings to the sorrow-stricken crowd in attendance, and proclaimed Peter III. The Senate and the heads of the Colleges, or Departments of State, then took the oath of allegiance to the new Emperor, and a short service was held in the Court Chapel, when Volkov recited the imperial manifesto declaring Peter to be the true and lawful heir to the throne. By this document the Emperor was made to promise that he would, in all respects, walk

in the footsteps of his illustrious grandfather, Peter the Great. The Archbishop of Novgorod thereupon saluted him as Gosudar, or Autocrat, and invited him to ascend the ancestral throne of his forefathers, "the rightful possession whereof all Europe and Asia acknowledge to be thine." Divine service over,[1] 360 men of the Body Corps and the three regiments of the Foot Guards, Preobrazhensky, Ismailovsky and Semenovsky, with Trubetskoi at their head, swore allegiance in the grand saloon of the Palace, whereupon Peter, surrounded by his staff, proceeded into the courtyard to receive the homage of the horse-guards, the line regiments of Ingria and Astrakhan, and the Corps of Cadets. As the spare trim little figure of the new Emperor, spotlessly attired in the green uniform with red facings of the Preobrazhensky Guards, appeared in the great square in front of the regiments, bolt upright on horseback, dimly illuminated by the smoking torches, and seeming every inch a soldier, the troops saluted him by presenting arms and dipping their standards, cheering enthusiastically as they took the oaths. Flushed with delight, Peter returned to the Palace, and shaking the Austrian Minister, Count Mercy, first by one hand and then by the other, declared vivaciously how pleased he had been to notice the personal devotion of the Guards. "I did not think they had so much love for me," said he. It was now six o'clock in the morning, and, at the stroke of the hour, the thunder of the cannon from the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, proclaimed the accession of the new monarch. Everyone by this time was in the best of humours.

[1] Mercy d'Argenteau, *Despatches:* Hermann, *Geschichte des Russischen Staats.* Bd. v. Abthl. 3.

The affability and good-nature of the new Emperor had dispersed all fears and doubts, at least in his immediate *entourage*. He had a kind word for everyone, even for his wife, to whom he showed every mark of attention,[1] though it was immediately obvious that she possessed not the slightest influence. The counsellors and cronies of the monarch were rewarded and promoted with almost indecent promptitude. Glyebov, besides retaining his lucrative charge of Commissary-General, was created Procurator-General of the Senate, the most important civil appointment in the Empire, which was wrested from its actual possessor, Prince Shakovsky, ere yet the Empress's breath had left her body. On the very day of the Emperor's accession, Ivan Vorontsov was created a Senator, and made Governor-General of Moscow. Two days later Trubetskoi received the lieutenant-colonelcy of the Preobrazhensky Guards, of which the Sovereign himself was Colonel, while Peter and Alexander Shuvalov were made field-marshals, though neither of these heroes had ever drawn a sword or smelt powder, except on parade. Count Peter's days indeed were already numbered; but, extenuated though he was, his avidity for employment and emolument was as keen as ever, and he actually had himself carried out of his own mansion into his friend Glyebov's residence because it was nearer to the Imperial Palace. Thither the Emperor frequently visited him to discuss affairs, but "this sensible arrangement," as the camarilla considered it, was suddenly terminated when Death, ten days later (Jan. 11th, 1762), removed Count Peter from a scene where for 20 years he

[1] *Mercy*, whose testimony on this point is all the more convincing, as he loved not Peter, and willingly disparaged him.

had played a leading part. Old Shuvalov's nephew, the late favourite Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov, also found his feet without difficulty. He continued to concentrate in his hands the control of the infantry, marine and artillery corps in the Capital, besides remaining Curator of the Moscow University, by virtue of which office he was virtually Minister of Public Instruction. The St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences remained under the guardianship of the lazy and luxurious Grand-Hetman, Count Cyril Razumovsky, who had posted back from his government in the Ukraine, as soon as the news of Elizabeth's death had reached him. His diligence was promptly rewarded with the Marshal's *bâton*. His elder brother, Count Alexius, the late Empress's morganatic husband, was the only one of the old courtiers who preserved a shred of dignity and self-respect. Peter III. had no sooner been proclaimed than the elder Razumovsky hastened to lay all his offices and dignities at the feet of the new Emperor, with the simple request that he might be allowed to retain a single country house wherein to spend the remainder of his days. The good-natured Sovereign, touched by this act of abnegation, refused to grant the petition of the honest ex-cossack shepherd,[1] but Alexius Razumovsky was not to be moved from his purpose, and he retired to the Anichovsky Palace, the last gift of his late wife, where he lived in the utmost seclusion.[2]

It had been a comparatively easy matter to help Peter

[1] For an account of the strange early career of this extraordinary man, *see* Bain: *The Daughter of Peter the Great*, pp. 142—4.

[2] Vasilchikov, *Semeistvo Razumovskikh*, Vol. I.

Aleksyevich to ascend his ancestral throne, how to keep him securely there was the real difficulty. Those about the new Emperor knew enough of his character and sentiments to make them anxious about the future. His frivolity, flightiness and obstinacy were notorious; but they believed with the English Ambassador, Mr. Keith, that Peter was open to reason, especially when it came from his friends, and they trusted that the goodness of his heart would neutralize the weakness of his head. They seem also to have calculated that by withdrawing from the ruinous and unpopular German War as speedily as possible, they might prevent any mischievous interference in the internal affairs of Russia on the part of the King of Prussia. They had yet to learn that nothing in the world is no incalculable as the vagaries of an unbalanced mind, and that no stubbornness is so stubborn as that of a feeble brain under the domination of a fixed idea.

The most obvious way of winning public favour was to inaugurate the new reign by a whole series of amnesties and reforms, and Peter, naturally benevolent, and always piquing himself on his freedom from prejudice, was willing enough to pose as the Father of his people. Accordingly on January 17/28, 1762, an Ukaz was issued, recalling from banishment Marshal Münnich, Biren, Natalia Lopukhina, the Lilienfelds, and all the other political exiles of the last reign. By a subsequent Ukaz, 4/15 March, Biren was permitted to exchange his comfortable retirement at Jaroslav for a grander residence at the capital. The re-appearance of Münnich and Biren at court excited no little curiosity. The Field Marshal was now in his eightieth, and the Duke

of Courland in his seventy-second year, but both the ancient rivals were still hale and hearty, and Münnich in particular astonished everyone by his singular vivacity. Even twenty years' imprisonment in the depths of Siberia had been powerless to break the spirit of this most juvenile of veterans.[1] There was, however, one significant exception from this general amnesty. On the very day of Peter's accession, the Grand Chancellor himself had petitioned the Emperor for the pardon and liberation of "the unfortunate Count Lestocq," Elizabeth's quondam surgeon and co-conspirator, who had subsequently alienated her by his unpatriotic political intrigues, and been banished to Uglish. But no-one was to be found to make a similar petition in favour of the unfortunate Count Bestuzhev. Such an omission necessarily made a painful impression upon every impartial and patriotic Russian. All the political offenders with foreign and even hated names were permitted to return to St. Petersburg and there received with open arms, while the one native statesman, who had so long and so vigorously maintained the honour and glory of Russia, was left out in the cold.

[1] "We had a most affecting scene at Court on Sunday, when the Duke of Courland and Mr. Münnich appeared together in the imperial circle. They both had their blue ribbons, and his Imperial Majesty showed great marks of distinction to both. It was a singular thing to see these two respectable persons return in health after twenty years' exile (the Duke is 72, the Marshal 79 years old) and appear again at a Court where they had formerly made so great a figure. They conversed together with great civility, and seemed to have forgotten that jealousy which had occasioned both their fates." *Brit. Mus. Bibl. Egerton. MS.* 1862. ff. 153—4.

But it was by the way of reform that Peter's councillors hoped to win the hearts of Peter's people. On January 17th, the Tsar signed a Ukaz reducing the oppressive and iniquitous salt tax, which he would have abolished altogether but for the needs of the Treasury. The same day he gave his sanction to a decree placing the Russian nobility and gentry on a footing of equality with those of other countries, with the option to serve the State or not at their own choice, and with full liberty to travel abroad. On February 7/18 the Emperor declared in a full session of the the Senate, that the Secret Chancellery, or judicial Torture Chamber[1] should be abolished, and, a fortnight later, a manifesto was issued whereby all secret informers were to be subjected to the most rigid examination, and nobody was henceforth to be arrested on information laid by them till after a thorough investigation of the alleged facts, and the issue of the necessary ukazes. On Jan. 29/Feb. 9 was published the Ukaz permitting the return of the *Raskolnitsi*, or Russian Dissenters, from Poland and other countries whither they had fled to avoid persecution during the reigns of the ultra-orthodox Empresses, Anne and Elizabeth. They were now allowed full liberty of worship, "inasmuch as" so ran the Ukaz, "Mahommedan and pagan idolators are already tolerated in the Russian Empire, and these Raskolnitsi are Christians after all, and, bigoted and superstitious as they may be, bitterness or violence is not the proper way to convert them." Peter, on his own initiative, had already forbidden

[1] It is true that during the gentle sway of the benevolent Elizabeth, this tribunal had been practically inoperative; still the merit of formally abolishing it belongs to Peter III.

the foolish and servile practice of doffing the hat on passing the Imperial Palace, and introduced several useful measures of police. During a *levée*, one morning, the Minister of Police, Von Korff, reported that a number of street robbers had been captured during the night. "Ah!" cried Peter, "I see it is high time I made the gallows fashionable again. This abuse of clemency has lasted too long, and has made many innocent people unhappy." And he ordered forthwith that the better parts of the city should be patrolled nightly, and that chains should be drawn across the chief thoroughfares. Towards the very end of his reign, he ordered that watch-houses should be built, at regular intervals, in every part of the city, and two watchmen maintained in each, and this salutary regulation was retained and extended by his successor.

There can be no doubt that these humane and enlightened measures produced the most favourable impression upon the people. Even the hostile Austrian Ambassador, Count Mercy, willingly admits that they were wise and provident, and deserved to win for the Emperor the love and the devotion of the whole Russian nation. We know also from Bolotov, the Russian Pepys, that the first public acts of Peter convinced everybody that he had "a heart inclined to goodness." Alluding to the ukaz relieving the nobility from its secular servitude, he observes: "This magnanimous act filled the whole nobility with indescribable joy... and our satisfaction was universal and most sincere."[1] He proceeds to say that the decree abolishing the Secret Chancellery

[1] *Zapiski.*

was equally agreeable to every Russian, and "we all blessed him for it." In fact the Senate was only voicing the sentiments of the whole nation, when, on the motion of Glyebov, it proposed, "as a token of its gratitude to the Emperor for his august favour," to erect a golden statue in his honour in the name of the whole of the nobility and gentry, whereupon the Senate *en masse* proceeded to petition his Majesty to grant their request. But Peter, somewhat abruptly, rejected the petition. He hoped, he said, that they would put their gold to a better purpose. A lasting remembrance of his reign engraved in the hearts of his subjects would be far more grateful to him than the erection of golden statues.

Moreover, at the beginning of his reign, the new Emperor manifested a feverish energy and a minute diligence in the discharge of his duties, which distressed and disquieted all the supine and somnolent bureaucrats who had grown up under the easy-going Elzabethan *régime*. Peter arose every morning, summer and winter, at 7 o'clock. While he was dressing, his adjutants were admitted to make reports and take orders. From eight to ten he was in his Cabinet consulting with his Ministers. Before ten he had already gone the round of all the public offices, often arriving there so early as to find no one but junior clerks on the premises, whereupon the Senators and Ministers would be roundly rebuked for neglecting their duties. At the stroke of eleven he appeared on the parade-ground, where all the officers were already awaiting him. After a rigorous inspection of his warriors (and woe betide the soldier whose cravat was improperly tied or whose buckles were not of the regulation

size) Peter, assisted by a Prussian officer, the subsequently celebrated General Bauer, would exercise the troops himself till one o'clock. It must also, in fairness, be admitted that he made an excellent drill-master. The veteran Münnich was astounded at the discipline and steadiness of the troops after a couple of months of this rigorous regimen, and confessed that he himself could not have done more within so short a time. At one o'clock Peter dined without the slightest ceremony, calling to his table any one of whatever rank with whom he would speak. Occasionally he accepted invitations to private houses, especially the houses of the English factors, where he was a great favourite. His afternoons were never idle. After a short siesta he would go about on a fresh tour of inspection, generally appearing when and where he was least expected. His evenings were devoted to amusements of a boisterous description in the circle of his Holstein officers, where the Emperor, though naturally abstemious, frequently smoked and drank more than was good for him, the proceedings generally terminating in rough horse-play. Very often, however, the time between dinner and supper was filled up with a concert, when Peter would, for hours at a time, play first violin in the orchestra with inconceivable ardour. Then came supper and a smoking party, which lasted generally far into the night, after which it was Peter's usual practice to discuss politics, and transact business with his confidants, till two o'clock. Yet he was always up again at seven o'clock next morning, so that he seemed to many people to be in a fair way towards ruining his health or shortening his days. To all those who had grown up beneath the old, tranquil, indolent sway of

Elizabeth, the bustle and racket of the new reign was very disturbing. "What with the marching and exercising of troops, and the rolling of carriages, and the traffic and concourse," says Bolotov, "St. Petersburg seems to have undergone a complete change, and all its circumstances are so altered that we seem to be breathing quite a different atmosphere."

No great harm would have ensued if this rude blast of reform had merely dispersed a few gouty old generals, and put to flight a host of useless officials; but, unfortunately, there was a febrile quality about the energy of the new sovereign which did not argue well for its stability, and made the prudent and far-seeing wonder what was coming next. "The moderation and clemency of the Emperor's acts," wrote Mercy to his Court as early as January 10th, "do not indicate anything fixed or definite. He has a mind but little exercised in affairs, little given to solid considerations, and continually occupied by prejudices. His natural disposition is heady, violent and irrational." The same acute observer was quick to note that Peter was already breaking away from counsellors no longer capable of restraining him within due bounds. Thus, a couple of days later, January 12th, he writes: "I can find nobody here of sufficient zeal and courage energetically to resist the vehement and obstinate temper of the Monarch. They all flatter his stubbornness for their own private ends, except the Chancellor, and so weak a man is he that he cannot be trusted to guide the feet of the Sovereign out of the wrong path." And again on February 1st: "There is nobody here to whom the foreign Ministers can apply for the slightest thing, and the exag-

gerated, fearful caution of subalterns goes so far that nothing intelligible can be got out of any of them." [1]

Perhaps nothing proves so conclusively the folly of Peter and the impotence of his Ministers, as the unlucky Ukaz of February 16/27, placing the control of all Church property in the hands of a new Department of State, the so-called "College of Economy." The effect of this ordinance, the promulgation of which the Senate succeeded in postponing till 21st March/1st April, was to convert the dignitaries of the Orthodox Church into mere salaried officials directly dependent on the State, and prepare the way for a wholesale secularization of Church property. The bulk of the Russian clergy and people naturally interpreted the Ukaz as an indecent attempt on the part of the Emperor to change their religion, for which he was known to have no very great respect, and many of the higher clergy, who suffered most, openly expressed their indignation at the outrage. Peter, indeed, seems seriously to have imagined that he could transform the Orthodox Church as well as pillage it, and flippantly meditated changes which Peter the Great, in the plenitude of his power, had not dared to suggest. Summoning the Russian Primate, the venerable Demetrius Sechnin, to his presence, he bluntly remarked that the veneration of ikons was a superstitious practice which had crept into the Church, and which he was determined to abolish. All ikons therefore, except those of the Blessed Virgin, must be removed from the churches forthwith. He further observed that the Russian clergy must

[1] Mercy, *Despatches.*

shave off their beards, abandon their long oriental vestments, and dress in future like Protestant pastors. The Archbishop, much distressed, protested that if the clergy were compelled to do such things, they would infallibly be murdered by their infuriated flocks. At this objection Peter fairly lost his temper and treated Sechnin so roughly that the aged prelate left the presence of his Sovereign with the fear of Siberia before his eyes.

Yet Peter was animated by no fanatical hatred of the Orthodox Church, as some have supposed. Abstract metaphysical questions were altogether beyond him, and he took little interest in religion *per se*. But his hero and ideal, the King of Prussia, was a free-thinker, and therefore it behoved him likewise to be a free-thinker. The great Frederick was never weary of sneering at priests and priestcraft, so little Peter also must have his fling at them. He was incapable, it is true, of pointing his sarcasms with epigrams after the fashion of his model; but at the Court Chapel he could pose as an *esprit fort* by lolling out his tongue at the Celebrant during Mass, or by strutting about, talking and laughing loudly during divine service, and he neglected no opportunity of so asserting himself. Of the harvest of contempt and hatred which he was thus sowing for himself in the hearts of his subjects he recked not at all. So long as he could imitate the King of Prussia in all things, he was perfectly satisfied with himself. He never realized that his first duty as a ruler was to Russia, and that everything else should have been strictly subordinated thereto. On the contrary, he thought far more of his petty ducal coronet than of his imperial crown. As

Mercy well remarks: "It is quite clear from his conduct and language that he regards his Russian realm as a mere bagatelle only so far agreeable as it enables him to carry out his intentions with regard to his German patrimony which is so near to his heart." Mercy's words were as true as they were caustic. But in order adequately to measure the fatuity of Peter III., who sacrificed the interests and the honour of Russia to the gratification of a mere whim, one must closely study his foreign policy, which certainly is unique in the annals of diplomacy.

CHAPTER V

"THE KING MY MASTER"

Desperate situation of Frederick II.—Elizabeth's death saves him from destruction—The mission of Gudovich—Baron Goltz sent by Frederick to St. Petersburg—Mr. Robert Keith paramount at St. Petersburg—His intimacy with Peter III. —Works energetically in the Prussian interest—Optimism of Mr. Keith—Arrival of Prince George of Holstein—Mercy refuses to pay him the first visit—Mercy boycotted—Scene between the Emperor and the French Ambassador at a banquet given by Vorontsov—Imperial peace declaration of Feb. 13th—Peter's enthusiastic reception of the Prussian Minister Von Goltz—Von Goltz's instructions—Prussia's relations with England—Lord Bute's pacific policy—Peter communicates Bute's despatch to Frederick II.—Fury of Frederick—Coldness between Prussia and England—Frederick's enthusiastic letters to Peter—The Russo-Prussian treaty of peace and alliance—Rejoicings and festivities at St. Petersburg.

On January 21st, 1762, the great Frederick thus wrote to his faithful Finckenstein: "You know that it is an urgent necessity for us promptly to be reconciled with Russia, so as to escape from the edge of the precipice." His position at that moment, though not absolutely so desperate as it had been twelve months before, was extremely precarious. Nearly a third of his domains was actually in the hands of his enemies. The Russians had annexed East Prussia and

occupied part of Pomerania. The Austrians held the best part of Silesia. With difficulty could he hold his own in Saxony. His twice pillaged Capital lay half in ruins. The shrewd refusal of his victorious enemies to exchange prisoners, had robbed him of his veteran soldiers, his army was now, for the most part, composed of raw recruits. His carefully economized savings still amounted, indeed, to some millions; but the doors of all the Courts of Europe, except that of Stambul, were shut against him, and he could only invest his money in the very doubtful speculation of bribing the Porte to invade Hungary. The sudden death of the Empress Elizabeth had shed the first ray of light upon his shattered fortunes, and he blessed Heaven for this unlooked for mercy with almost religious fervour. From that instant his hopes began to revive. "I can only compare my situation," he wrote to Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, "to that of Louis XIV. in the War of the Spanish Succession. What the disgrace of the Marlborough faction was to him, the death of the Russian Empress is to me."[1] To rid himself of the Russian incubus, he was, at last, prepared to make heavy sacrifices, even to the surrender of the province of East Prussia, to which he owed his royal title. But now the unexpected, the unimaginable happened—on February 20th, 1762, Brigadier Baron Gudovich, Peter III.'s confidant, arrived in the Prussian camp at Breslau! Russia, the victor, the oppressor; Russia, the dictator of the political situation, was actually making the first pacific overtures to the vanquished!

Frederick instantly grasped the full significance of this

[1] *Pol. Cor.* Jan. 1762.

momentous event, and utilized it to the uttermost. He had already given orders to his generals and commandants to release all the Russian prisoners in their hands, and send them to St. Petersburg without ransom or exchange, but such a *rapprochement* as Gudovich's mission, he had had no right to expect. Dressed in deep mourning, as a token of his respect for the late Empress, he welcomed the Russian envoy to his camp with effusion. "You are," cried he, "the instrument employed by Providence to cement my happy union with that dear and admirable Emperor of yours. I regard you as Noah regarded the dove which brought the olive branch to the ark." "The dove" was so impressed indeed, by his hearty reception, that thenceforth he became attached heart and soul to the Prussian cause. As, however, he had been sent only to announce Peter's accession, and was not provided with definite instructions, Frederick could not open negotiations with him on the spot, but was obliged to despatch a special Ambassador to the Russian Capital. His choice fell upon his adjutant and Kammerherr, Baron von Goltz, a young officer of twenty-six, whom he promoted to the rank of Colonel for that very occasion, being well aware of Peter's *penchant* for military men. In the meanwhile the care of the Prussian interest at the Russian Court was confided to Mr. Robert Keith, the English Ambassador at St. Petersburg, who was known to be a *persona gratissima* with Peter III. In fact, at the very beginning of the new reign, Frederick himself, never imagining that Russia would take the first step towards a reconciliation, had privately instructed Keith "to greet the new Emperor and Empress in the name of their old friend."

Keith had, in 1758, been transferred from Vienna to St. Petersburg, to counteract the Franco-Austrian influence, and prop up the tottering Chancellor, Count Alexius Bestuzhev. He had arrived too late to do either, but his Prussian sympathies had completely won the heart of the Grand-Duke, and he was now able to render Frederick II. essential services. For the first ten weeks of the reign of Peter III., Keith's influence at the Russian Court was absolutely paramount. He was, as Mercy puts it: "the mainspring and the chief instrument of the Prussian Party."—"Not a day passes," adds the Austrian Minister, "but what the Emperor sees Mr. Keith, or sends him fruit, or pays him other attentions,"[1] and he insinuates that no small portion of the £100,000[2] secret service money placed at Keith's disposition by his Government (£20,000 of which he was authorized to spend in presents) passed into the pockets of Peter, who thus had good reason to be grateful to his English friend. Keith's own despatches show how very intimate were his relations with the Emperor at this time. Only three days after Peter's accession, the British Minister wrote to his Court as follows: "At a dinner, his Imperial Majesty, whose good graces I have always been honoured with, came up to me and smilingly told me in my ear that he hoped I would be pleased with him, as the night before he had despatched couriers to the several bodies of his army, with orders not to advance further into Prussian territory and to abstain from all hostilities." Three weeks later Keith had the honour of supping with the Emperor in the Countess Elizabeth Vorontsova's apartments

[1] Mercy, *Despatches.*

[2] Keith, *Despatches, Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 30,999 f. 11.*

at Court, "and you may believe that I was punctual to my hour," he exultantly writes to Bute. On this occasion Peter was more than usually confidential and communicative. He declared that he wanted to settle matters with the King of Prussia as soon as possible, and was resolved "to get loose of all engagements with the Court of Vienna." Keith suggested that the best way to cut short all useless negotiations with the Empress-Queen was to command Zachary Chernuishev, the commander of the Russian contingent, to leave the Austrians forthwith and march across the Oder into Poland, and Peter, "who seemed to relish the proposal," gave the necessary orders for this momentous step a few days later. He then talked very slightingly of the King of Poland, and showed great animosity against the Saxon Minister, Count Brühl, whom he considered along with Kaunitz and Bestuzhev, as "the three incendiaries who had kindled the flames of war over the greatest part of Europe," adding, "in his lively way," that "he wished his fleet were worth offering to his (Britannic) Majesty against Spain." Peter also assured Keith that no treaty of commerce with France, to which Power he alluded with the greatest contempt, should ever take place in his time, so that altogether the British Minister was well content with his evening's work. A fortnight later, at Tsarkoe Selo, Peter communicated to his English friend a still more interesting piece of information, drawing him aside into the embrasure of a window, under the pretence of obtaining a better view of "a noble display of fireworks." The Austrian Ambassador, Count Mercy, he said, had recently expressed his surprise to the Chancellor Vorontsov that his Imperial Majesty should

have entered into a cessation of arms with his hereditary enemy without any previous concert with his Allies who could not but regard it as a "*pas précipité.*" — "*Pas précipité* indeed!" cried Peter in a tone of the deepest resentment. As to the epithet "hereditary enemy," he protested that he could not understand it, having never heard of any former quarrel between Russia and the House of Brandenburg. He then told Keith that the Court of Vienna, in order to fix him in their alliance, had fairly offered him money to make war with Denmark, but that he had announced that he had no occasion for their money, but hoped that he should always find enough of his own to carry on any wars he should be obliged to make. Keith, naturally enough, was delighted with this state of things. Circumstances had suddenly placed him in a commanding position. He was the counsellor of Kings and the comrade of Emperors. He was in constant communication with Frederick II. (indeed his Austrian rival expressly declares that Keith received more couriers from Breslau than from London) and the issues of peace and war hung upon his lips. No wonder, then, if he reported to his Court that everything at St. Petersburg wore the most smiling aspect; that the Emperor was taking every step that could contribute to the happiness of his subjects, and that his repeated acts of humanity and generosity would gain all hearts and endear his name to all future ages. [1]

The Austrian Minister, Court Mercy d'Argenteau had a very different tale to tell. It must certainly have been very distressing to that patriotic diplomatist to hear from day to day

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 39,999.

of Peter's reckless and extravagant outbursts against the court of Vienna; but it is undeniable that he himself made bad worse by his over-punctilious regard for the *minutiæ* of etiquette in the midst of an acute political crisis. The moment when the fate of two great Empires depended upon humouring the caprices of a monomaniac, was surely not the time, in which to raise questions as to the propriety of kissing hands, or the expediency of paying the first visit to a kinsman of the Tsar at the Tsar's particular request. The kinsman in question was Peter's uncle, Prince George of Holstein, who arrived at St. Petersburg, on February 13th, at the special invitation of the Emperor, who went out to meet him all the way to Tsarkoe Selo, twenty-eight versts off, with his whole Court equipage, and escorted him back to the Capital with enthusiastic demonstrations of joy. The Foreign ministers, shortly afterwards, were formally requested in the Emperor's name by Baron le Fort, the Master of the Ceremonies, to wait upon Prince George with their congratulations, and the British, Swedish, Prussian, Danish and Dutch Ministers at once complied with the request. Mercy, however, refused to pay the first visit to a mere *Reichs-fürst* who was not even a Prince of the Blood, and the French Minister, Baron de Breteuil, and the Spanish Minister, the Marquis d'Almadovar, followed his example. Peter was mightily incensed. He vowed to Keith that he had great difficulty in keeping his hands off the French Minister, and at any rate would keep an eye upon him, and he refused to grant either Breteuil or Mercy an audience till they had complied with his request. The consequence was that, for six weeks, the Emperor was invisible to Mercy,

and as all the Russian Ministers also avoided him like the plague, he was almost useless to his Court during that period, and was reduced to the humiliating and circuitous expedient of bribing subordinate officials for information which should have reached him in the ordinary way as a matter of course. Even his friend, the sick Chancellor Vorontsov, could only sigh and shrug his shoulders, and express regret that he could do nothing for the old alliance. The Emperor, said Vorontsov, meant to be master. And, indeed, Vorontsov, since the abolition of the *Konferents*, or Cabinet Council, on January 22 29, had been virtually superseded by Secretary Volkov, who had apartments in the Palace, and was one of the chief members of the Camarilla, which transacted current affairs with the Emperor in his Cabinet at two o'clock in the morning. Mercy tried every conceivable means of getting hold of Volkov, but always in vain, while the Emperor's second confidant, private Secretary Olsufiev, told the Austrian minister, in as many words, that he durst not be seen in his company.

Nevertheless, on Feb. 25, Mercy had the privilege of both seeing and hearing Peter III. and of witnessing a scene, unique of its kind, of which he has left us a graphic description. The occasion was a banquet given by Vorontsov to the Emperor, at which all the foreign Ministers and three hundred distinguished persons of both sexes were present. Mercy found Peter amicable and even affectionate, but extraordinarily reserved. He avoided all reference to affairs, but before dinner had a long private conversation on current politics with Keith and the Prussian officers Werner and Hordt, both of them ex-prisoners of war whom he had

released and honoured with his intimacy. Hordt, of whom he was particularly fond, he generally addressed as "my brother!" At nine o'clock the company sat down to table, after drawing lots for their places to avoid ceremony, which Peter detested. During the course of the meal, which lasted four hours, the Emperor drank more Burgundy and water than was good for his weak head; grew uncommonly heated and excited, and protested his respect, devotion and admiration for the King of Prussia whose praises he bawled forth at the top of his voice. On rising from the table the usual baskets full of pipes and tobacco were brought in; most of the men fell a-smoking and Peter played for a time at *campis*, his favourite round-game at cards, at which each person staked a certain number of lives, putting ten gold imperials into the pool as the stake for each life, the survivor being the winner. The Foreign Ministers, at the Emperor's invitation, took part in this game, among them being the French Ambassador, the Baron de Breteuil. Presently Peter, with a singular lack of dignity, began heckling that Minister in what Mr. Keith indulgently called "his lively way." To both Breteuil and Mercy, on the other hand, such pleasantry in public savoured of indecent buffoonery. As, however, his Imperial Majesty obviously was somewhat in liquor and meant to be good-humoured, Breteuil affected not to hear him, and Mercy made no attempt to intervene. But Peter, was not so easily suppressed, and a little later when all the *campis* players had been worsted, except the Spanish Ambassador, the Marquis d'Almadovar and a couple of Court Ladies, Peter, who was now pacing up and down the room, pipe in hand, suddenly came upon Breteuil in a corner, and waving his hand towards

d'Almadovar, exclaimed: "Mark my words! Spain is going to lose!" The sore and sensitive French Ambassador scenting behind this really innocent remark some covert allusion to the maritime war actually proceeding between Great Britain and Spain, the latter Power then being in alliance with France, was at once upon his mettle, and caustically retorted: "We hope, most gracious Sir, that Spain will not lose, for we are with her, especially if you, Sir, remain faithful to the present system, as you promised to be." The Ambassador's retort seemed to sober the Emperor, who passed, in an instant, from light badinage to furious wrath. "I have told you already," cried he, "that peace is what I mean to have—yes, peace! —peace!—and if you are not a little more accommodating, it will be a bad business for you. Let me tell you that! *Je suis soldat et point leger!*" As may readily be imagined, the excitement was intense and expectation stood on tip-toe, for the Monarch evidently was beside himself with rage, and Breteuil was a young officer of notoriously choleric temperament. Fortunately, the Ambassador, on this occasion, sufficiently controlled himself to avoid bandying words with the Emperor, and turning instead to his host, the Grand Chancellor, gave him most emphatically to understand that he should report the occurrence, which could not fail to be very painful to his Court. Vorontsov, of course, could only shrug his shoulders and protest, *sotto voce*, that it was quite beyond his power to prevent such unpleasantnesses, however much he might deplore them.

The unreasonable merriment of the Emperor was doubly offensive to the Allied ministers, because his public acts were becoming more and more menacing to their respective Courts.

The prevailing political current was only too obviously whirling Russia away from her ancient moorings with irresistible force. On Feb. 13th, the Grand Chancellor, who now was never employed unless something unpleasant had to be done, sent for the Imperial, the French, the Saxon and the Swedish Ambassadors and handed to them a Declaration which could not have been very agreeable to any of them. In this document, which was subsequently communicated to all the foreign courts, his Imperial Majesty declared that inasmuch as the promotion of the welfare of his subjects was the primary duty of every ruler, he could not but regret that the flames of a war which had already lasted six years, so far from showing any sign of abatement, were extending their ravages ever more and more to the manifest detriment of Europe. His Imperial Majesty therefore, shocked at such a useless effusion of blood, and anxious to terminate so great an evil, judged it expedient to declare to all the Courts in alliance with Russia, that in order to restore to his own Empire and to Europe the blessings of peace, he was ready to sacrifice all the conquests made by the Russian arms, in the expectation that the Allied Courts would also prefer the restoration of the general tranquillity to any particular contingent advantages, only obtainable by further bloodshedding, and would consequently contribute, to the utmost of their ability, to the accomplishment of so salutary a work.

After listening in silence to the Imperial Declaration, the ministers of the Allied Powers declined to give any opinion upon it till they had received further particulars, while Mercy on being left alone with the Chancellor, bluntly

declared that many passages of the document in question were both suspicious and impertinent. To his own Court he described the Declaration as downright venomous, inasmuch as its plausibly pacific tone was a mere device to evade the performance of the most solemn treaty-obligations and open a way of deliverance for the peccant King of Prussia.

The Declaration was, indeed, but the preliminary to a formal alliance with Frederick. On March 3rd, the extraordinary Prussian Envoy, the Baron von Goltz, arrived at St. Petersburg and was received by Peter with enthusiastic effusiveness. He had scarce had time to congratulate the Emperor on his accession in the name of the King his master, when Peter literally overwhelmed him with the most ardent assurances of his own boundless devotion and admiration for the King of Prussia, and whispered in his ear that he had a great deal to talk to him about in private. Immediately after his audience, Peter thrust his arm through that of his newest friend and carried him off to dinner, talking incessantly of the Prussian army and amazing Goltz by his intimate acquaintance with the *minutiæ* of the subject. He knew the names and degrees of seniority of the Colonels and principal officers of every regiment for years back.[1] Goltz was speedily provided with a mansion near the Palace and a magnificent court equipage, an honour denied even to the friendly Swedish Ambassador, Count Düben, although he was higher in rank than Goltz. Peter henceforth made a practice of visiting Goltz twice a day, besides dining and supping with him every day. Indeed, before another week was out, Goltz had

[1] Mercy, *Despatches.*

entirely eclipsed his English colleague, Mr. Keith, who, at first, had undertaken to be his *cicerone*. Henceforth, till the end of the reign, the Prussian influence was to be omnipotent at the Russian Court.

Goltz had been sent to St. Petersburg with the express object of terminating the war with Russia and detaching her from the Allies. He was to be guided by two notorious facts, Peter's predilection for his Holstein Duchy and his enthusiasm for the King of Prussia. He was to assure the Emperor that Frederick regarded the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the seat of war as a real mark of friendship which should never be forgotten, and he was empowered to consent, if necessary, to the cession of East Prussia[1] to Russia, provided that Frederick was compensated elsewhere—the *elsewhere* ultimately to be decided by the King of Prussia himself. This was a remarkable surrender on the part of Frederick, a surrender rather due, however, to his apprehension of being deserted by England than to his gratitude to Peter III. Ever since the beginning of 1762 the relations between the Courts of St. James's and Berlin had been barely cordial. The English Government was growing weary of the costly and unremunerative German War, especially now that the maritime war with France and Spain was engrossing all its energies and resources. The subsidies hitherto paid to the King of Prussia were now badly wanted elsewhere, and even Frederick's admirers in London began to regret the obstinacy of their hero in refusing to yield not so much to his enemies as to Destiny. In January 1762, in reply to the

[1] Solovev, *Istoria Rossii.*

categorical demand of the Prussian Minister, Knyphausen, as to what the English Government meant to do with reference to the war in Germany, Lord Bute informed him that in view of Great Britain's new war with Spain, His Britannic Majesty could not undertake vigorously to support the Allies in Germany during the ensuing campaign, and he opined that Frederick should open negotiations with Austria forthwith. Knyphausen himself was so convinced of the reasonableness of this suggestion, that he respectfully advised his master not to "kick against" the views of the English Government.[1] "The English Government," wrote Knyphausen on this occasion, "have often insinuated that the greatest Powers having been obliged, at some time or other, to make sacrifices, no Prince ought to declare that he will never make peace at any price." But the great Frederick was less than ever in a mood to be dictated to, and Knyphausen was snubbed severely for his pains and threatened with the direst penalties, if ever again he so far forgot himself as to give his master advice when it was not wanted. Bute, however, was indisposed any further to support Prussia in a war which had ceased to be advantageous to England and he hailed the accession of Peter III. as a favourable opportunity for bringing about a general pacification. The first step, of course, was to relieve Frederick of the crushing Russian incubus, the only question being—how cheaply could Russia be bought off. Bute, accordingly, asked Prince Golitsuin, the Russian Ambassador at London, what portions of the conquered Prussian territories Russia wished to retain.

[1] "*Se cabrer.*" Frederick II. *Pol. Corr.* 1762.

Golitsuin, who was imbued with the old patriotic Elizabethan spirit and had no notion of Peter's infatuation for the King of Prussia, repudiated the idea that the new Emperor would surrender any of the Russian conquests, especially as Frederick himself regarded them as so much lost territory. Any such surrender, he remarked, would be incompatible not merely with the honour and glory, but with the very safety of the Russian Empire, especially as his Imperial Master had resolved to begin his reign by incorporating the whole of East Prussia, a province which not only was his by conquest, but had never belonged to the *Reich* at all. "Lord Bute," reported Golitsuin, 26th Jan. 1762, "appeared well content with my answer. The fact is they are growing very tired of their league with Prussia and would gladly embrace the first opportunity of getting out of it."[1] The English, he went on to say, did not want an eternal war upon their hands simply to oblige the King of Prussia, who was flattering himself with possessing the entire favour of the Russian Emperor besides nursing other chimerical hopes. "This Court," he concluded, "however warm it may be for peace, does not wish your Majesty to withdraw the troops at present operating against the King of Prussia.... The withdrawal of your Majesty's troops so far from accelerating peace, would only make the war drag on all the more, inasmuch as such withdrawal would enable the King of Prussia to continue for a long time the war against the Empress-Queen, a thing which this court by no means desires. What it does desire is to save the King of Prussia

[1] Golitsuin, *Despatches,* cited by Solovev.

from total ruin, but at the same time oblige him to make reasonable sacrifices."

This was both common-sense and sound diplomacy, but, unfortunately, Bute's nicely balanced "system" was instantly and irretrievably upset by the incalculable indiscretion of Peter III. Bute, naturally, had impressed upon Golitsuin the absolute necessity of secrecy (more particularly as Goltz's secret mission to St. Petersburg struck the English Ministry as underhand and suspicious), and Golitsuin might well be pardoned for supposing that if his despatch containing Bute's confidences were safe anywhere, it would be so in the custody of his Imperial Master whom it so nearly concerned. By this time, however, Peter worshipped Frederick as if he were a god, even alluding to him in public as "the King my master." As the Saxon minister, Prasse, put it: "Here at St. Petersburg the King of Prussia *is* the Emperor." Indeed the correspondence between the two monarchs was, by this time, of the most affectionate description. There almost seemed to be a wager between them as to which of the twain should pay the other the most fulsome compliments. The cynical philosopher of Sans Souci at times becomes almost sentimental in the expression of his gratitude to his Imperial friend, who, by detaching Chernuishev's division from the Austrians, had enabled him to employ elsewhere,[1] where it was badly wanted, the army corps which hitherto had been employed to guard Berlin. "When one behaves so nobly and with a nobility so uncommon in our days," wrote Frederick to

[1] Fred. II., *Pol. Corr.* 1762.

Peter, "one has a right to be admired. And that is what your Imperial Majesty will find. The first acts of your Majesty's reign have drawn down upon you the benedictions of your subjects and the blessings of the sanest part of Europe."—And again: "Whilst all the rest of Europe is persecuting me, I find a friend in you. I find a friend who has a truly German heart,[1] a friend who would never suffer Germany to become the slave of the House of Austria. In you I place all my trust, and I vow to you a loyal and eternal friendship."—"Your majesty," replied Peter humbly, "surely laughs at me when you praise me so highly. In truth you must be amazed at my nothingness while I am amazed at your Majesty's exploits. Your qualities are extraordinary. I recognise in your Majesty one of the greatest heroes the world has ever seen."[2]

After this, Peter's infatuation for his Deity knew no bounds. He took not a single step without first consulting Frederick, even communicating to him private information which he withheld from his own ministers. So now, too, Peter had no sooner read Golitsuin's despatch which was marked "most secret," (it reached him on March 13th) than he at once sent a copy of it to Frederick, and the same day informed Goltz, to whom he had also shewn the despatch, that he would be glad to receive peace propositions from the King of Prussia without loss of time. Goltz naturally advised his master to comply with the Emperor's request as speedily as possible, more especially

[1] Surely a somewhat doubtful compliment for a Russian Emperor.

[2] Solovev, *Istoria Rossii.*

as the anti-Prussian Party in Russia was "very numerous." As a matter of fact, it already comprised every Russian of note, with the single exception of Adjutant Godunov, the diplomatic "dove" who had first brought the Emperor's olive-branch to Frederick II.

But Frederick needed very little prompting. The immediate result of his perusal of Golitsuin's despatch was a violent explosion of wrath against the English Ministry. He had felt bound to temporize with them hitherto in the slender hope of obtaining the wherewithal for carrying on a new campaign; but he had deeply resented their mode of negotiating with him "*bâton levé*" as he expressed it, and this crowning instance of their duplicity at last convinced him that, for the present, the bottom was knocked out of the English Alliance and he could safely throw himself into the arms of Russia. His abuse of the English Ministry, however, knew no bounds. Bute, he said, deserved to be broken alive on the wheel, and Devonshire was every whit as bad.[1] He wrote to his sister, Queen Ulrica of Sweden, that he no longer durst trust the English. At one time he thought seriously of breaking off all communications with the Bute Cabinet and placing the documents relating to the Russian negotiations before the leading members of the Opposition in the House of Commons. But, finally, he was persuaded first of all to consult his constant friend Pitt, though he openly declared that he only kept Knyphausen and Michel, his Ministers at London, at their posts to avoid the scandal of an open rupture with Great Britain, and he revenged himself on the

[1] *Pol. Corr.*, March 1762.

English Government by sedulously concealing from them the nature of his negotiations with Russia, to the manifest chagrin of Bute, who openly complained of this breach of amity, both through Keith at St. Petersburg and through Mitchell, the English Ambassador at Berlin.

And Frederick's gratitude to Peter was even more emphatic than his anger against Bute. "I should be the most ungrateful, the most unworthy of men," he wrote to the Emperor on March 23rd, "if I were not deeply touched by the generous procedure of your Majesty. Your Majesty exceeds my expectations, you reveal to me the treachery of my Allies, you help me when the whole universe is on the point of abandoning me. Nature has endowed me with a sensitive and grateful heart and I cannot but be deeply touched by all that your Majesty has done for me. Make what treaties you like and I will sign them. Your interests are mine. Yes, I swear it, and never will I depart from my oath. You give an example of virtue to all Sovereigns which should draw to you the hearts of all honest folk. I place my entire confidence in your Majesty."[1] Goltz received *carte blanche* in the matter of the negotiations. "Contract any obligation that the Emperor may require of you," wrote Frederick. "I authorize you to do so. He is my friend. He has only to draw up his treaties and I will sign them. And tell his Imperial Majesty, by way of compliment, that however old I may be, I shall always be ready, if the case demand it, to set off in person to defend his territories."

After this, the political obstacles in the way of such a

[1] *Pol. Corr.* April—May, 1762.

union of hearts were quickly surmounted. Of anything like regular and serious negotiations there is, naturally, not a trace. How could there be when the hero-worshipper was eager to sacrifice everything to his hero, and the hero had only to receive what was offered with his best bow and smile? Frederick sent the draft treaty to St. Petersburg by Court Schwerin, who was one of the first Prussian prisoners of war released by Peter and already stood high in his confidence. The draft should, of course, first of all, have been submitted to the Russian Chancellor, but Vorontsov was not even consulted. Von Goltz simply read it to the Emperor in private without witnesses and Peter signed it without comment on April 24, May 5. Only then was it sent to Vorontsov for confirmation. By this surreptitious treaty, one of the most disgraceful documents ever signed by a Russian Sovereign, Peter, by a single pen-stroke, not only restored to Prussia all the territory won from her by Russia during the last five years, but contracted a regular definitive alliance with Prussia "befitting present conjunctures." Each of the Allies engaged to assist the other, in case of attack, with 12,000 infantry and 4000 cavalry, and neither was to make peace without the knowledge or consent of the other. By a first secret article the grateful King of Prussia engaged to help Peter to recover the Duchy of Sleswick from Denmark, even going the length of promising him the assistance of a Prussian Army Corps for that purpose, besides an additional 16,000 men if he were attacked elsewhere. By a second secret article Frederick engaged to help to place Prince George of Holstein on the Ducal Throne of Courland and compensate Biren with the Principality of Warten-

berg. By a third secret article the Allies agreed to permit no change in the form of the constitution of Poland, and on the death of the reigning King, Frederick was to use all his influence to procure the election of a person agreeable to the Emperor of Russia. There were also two separate articles restricting the operation of the treaty. By the first of these it was stipulated that Frederick was to remain neutral in any war between Russia and Turkey or Persia, while Peter was to remain neutral in any war between Prussia and France or England. By the second separate article the two contracting Powers constituted themselves the protectors of the Polish Dissidents. Immediately after the signature of this treaty Prince Nikolai Vasilevich Repnin was appointed Russian Ambassador to the King of Prussia, whom he found in his camp at Zeitendorff, near Breslau. Thus the diplomatic relations between Russia and Prussia, which had been interrupted for six years, were permanently re-established.

The peace with Russia was speedily followed by a treaty of peace between Prussia and Sweden (May 2nd) on a *quod ante bellum* basis, which released the Prussian army corps in Pomerania and Mecklenburg. "I flatter myself," wrote Frederick to his sister, Queen Ulrica, on this occasion, "that I shall now no longer be regarded as a political leper with whom all intercourse is to be avoided." The "chaplet of the Grand Alliance" was indeed beginning "to lose its leaves."

Six days after the signature of the treaty, the Emperor celebrated the conclusion of his peace with Prussia by a great banquet in gala, at which every guest was placed according to his rank, it was indeed the first ceremonial banquet of his reign. Peter himself, the Grand-Chancellor

Vorontsov and the Vice-Chancellor Golitsuin, all wore the order of the Black Eagle on this occasion. The banquet lasted four hours and four toasts were drunk, the first as an expression of joy and thanksgiving at the public restoration of peace with the King of Prussia; the second by way of congratulating the same potentate; the third was to the perpetual friendship of the two Powers in the future,[1] and the fourth was in honour of "all the valiant officers and soldiers in the Prussian Army." Each of these toasts was accompanied by a triple salvo from all the guns in the Fortress of Peter and Paul and the Admiralty, as well as from fifty pieces of ordnance planted for that special purpose in the great square facing the Palace. Indeed the firing of guns was kept up till 11 o'clock at night, and the Austrian Ambassador calculated that some thousands of pounds of ammunition must have been wasted. All day long Peter was beside himself with delight, and gave free play to his feelings, omitting, as Count Mercy scornfully complains, "nothing in the way of indecency and offensiveness in regard to his ancient ally, *i.e.* Austria." A state ball in the apartments of the Palace overlooking the Neva followed the banquet, and the fireworks and illuminations which crowned the festal day were the most magnificent that had ever been seen in Russia. The chief display, on the Vasilevsky Island, in front of the Palace, lasted for hours and cost thousands of rubles. In the first tableau, two colossal figures, representing Russia and Prussia, gradually approached each other from opposite directions and embraced affectionately. Scarcely

[1] Mercy, *Despatches*, May 1762.

had they disappeared when, on the very spot of their fraternal salute, there suddenly grew up a palm-tree "burning with the most beautiful green fire"[1] in the midst of a grove of similar trees forming a sort of amphitheatre all around. Yet the delighted spectators were still more impressed by the crowning tableau which represented a huge temple of Janus, with golden galleries on both sides and two gates all ablaze with light, which finally faded away in the midst of a landscape of burning waterfalls and cascades.

[1] Bolotov, *Zapiski*. Bolotov was an eye-witness of the display.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW DIPLOMACY

Imperial rescript to the Court of Vienna—Consternation of the Austrian Ministry—Austria vainly offers Peter help against Denmark—Mercy demands his recall—Indignation of France—Choiseul and Chernuishev—Declaration of Louis XV.—Rupture between Russia and France—Vorontsov supersedes Golitsuin at London—Denmark threatened by Peter—Prussia and England opposed to a Russo-Danish War—Pacific efforts of Keith and Goltz—Anxiety of Poland—Frederick's negotiations with the Porte—Peter's foreign policy a mischievous retrogression—And dishonourable to Russia—Dismay of the Russian Statesmen—Difficult position of the Grand-Chancellor—Attitude of Ivan Shuvalov and Sec. Volkhov—Sycophancy of Trubetskoi and Cyril Razumovsky—Their ridiculous position—Anecdotes related by Bolotov—General dissatisfaction with Peter.

As may readily be imagined this sensational political *volte-face* profoundly agitated all the Chanceries of Europe. The first official notification which the Court of Vienna received of the defection of its principal Ally against Prussia was the Imperial Rescript of Feb. 29th addressed to Prince Dmitry Mikhailovich Golitsuin, the Russian Ambassador at Vienna, commanding him to communicate to the Empress-Queen, in the most befitting terms, the intention of the new Emperor henceforth to dispense with Austria's subsidies and sacrifice all his conquests in the interests of peace so necessary for the benefit of his own dominions and for the prosperity

of Europe. In reply to this communication, the Austrian Ministers, Kaunitz and Colleredo, declared, with sub-sarcastic innuendo, that the Court of Vienna had always been desirous of peace, but could give no definitive reply to the Russian note till it had consulted all the Allies. They also enquired how the Emperor proposed to set about re-establishing the peace of Europe. The solicited information was supplied by the Rescript of April 19th, which declared that as it was impossible to reconcile the conflicting pretensions of the various belligerents by a Peace Congress, whose sole effect would be to sow new dissension among the Allies and prolong the war indefinitely, it was necessary for one of the belligerents to come forward as a general pacificator. "This we alone are in a position to do," proceeded the Rescript, "and we do it out of compassion for suffering humanity and from personal friendship for the King of Prussia. The Austrian Court is therefore invited to follow our example." To this Colleredo pertinently replied that the obstinacy of the common enemy was the only impediment to the conclusion of peace. But if the first two Russian Rescripts were dictatorial, the third Rescript, dated May 12th, was downright menacing. In the first despatch we can still trace the softening touches of Secretary Volkov, who struggled as long and as much as he dared against the perverse political bias of his new master; but Rescript No. 2 is evidently inspired, and Rescript No. 3 is plainly dictated, by Prussians and Prusiaks.[1] In this last Rescript the continuance of the war is attributed solely to the obstinate determination of the Court of

[1] Russian philo-Prussians.

Vienna to deprive the King of Prussia of what had been ceded to him by solemn treaties, and Peter bluntly declared that inasmuch as his good offices had proved useless and a continuance thereof would be derogatory to his dignity, he found himself regretfully compelled to resort to the extreme measure of assisting the King of Prussia with his forces as being the shortest way to restore to humanity the blessings of peace. To this the sorely harassed Austrian Chancellor could only reply that the Empress-Queen, to that very day, did not know whether the King of Prussia desired peace or not, she herself was quite ready to open negotiations. [1] As a last expedient, the Austrian Court offered to assist Peter with subsidies and even auxiliary troops against Denmark, a friendly Power with whom Austria had no quarrel whatever. This dishonest and unscrupulous proposal failed as it deserved to fail. [2] "I hope to deal with my enemies single-handed," replied Peter III., "and if I do need assistance I shall look for it anywhere but at the Court of Vienna." [3] By this time, indeed, Peter had already burnt his boats, having guaranteed to Frederick II. not only Silesia and Glatz, but all the territory he might win in the future from the Empress-Queen, while Zachary Chernuishev, who was reputed to be the second-best general in the Russian service, was ordered to join the Prussians in the beginning of June with 16,000 regulars and 1000 cossacks in order to give Austria the *coup de grâce.* [4] No wonder then if Mercy,

[1] Solovev, *Istoria Rossii, Peter III.*
[2] For full particulars, see *infra,* Chap. VIII.
[3] Solovev, compare Keith, *Despatches.*
[4] Solovev.

who at last, and all in vain, had pocketed his pride and paid the first visit to Prince George of Holstein, no wonder if Mercy, disgusted at his loss of influence at a Court where, during the last reign, he had been the paramount diplomatist, now demanded his recall and suggested the appointment, in his place, of a Resident of the third rank, by preference a soldier, "who would better suit the humour of the Emperor who is nothing if not military."

The extremely difficult position of Austria compelled her to moderate her tone even under the most intense provocation. But France, the other mainstay of the anti-Prussian league was under no such compulsion, and her Ministers spoke their minds freely to Count Chernuishev, the Russia Minister at Paris. Choiseul, with difficulty, restrained his indignation at the sudden subversion of the old political system without one word of warning. Chernuishev himself was painfully conscious of the awkwardness of his position. When he communicated the intelligence of the peace between Russia and Prussia, he could only vaguely expatiate on the humanity of the Tsar and his tender care for the benefit of his subjects. "Sir," haughtily replied Choiseul, "the maintenance of solemn engagements ought to over-ride every other consideration." The declaration of Louis XV., in reply to the Russian note, was severe and sarcastic, but not without dignity. The most Christian King let all the world perceive that he was angry and had good cause to be angry. His Majesty, so the declaration ran, was willing to listen to overtures for a durable and honourable peace, but in such case he must act in full accord with his Allies and would only adopt such measures as were dictated by honour and

probity. The King would consider himself to be a traitor if he took part in secret negotiations. The King would stain his honour and the honour of his realm if he were to desert his Allies. Sovereigns ought not to forget that the first law prescribed to rulers by the Almighty was fidelity to treaties and an exact observance of obligations. Henceforth Louis XV. turned his back upon Chernuishev at public functions and ignored his existence.

Peter's insistence upon the Baron de Breteuil paying the first visit upon Prince George of Holstein was another source of irritation to the Court of Versailles. The Tsar had even gone the length of informing all the foreign Ministers at St. Petersburg, through the Chancellor, that he himself would not give them an audience till they had obliged him in this little matter. "It is a strange and extraordinary proceeding to give so much importance to trivialities," said Choiseul to Chernuishev. "Ambassadors have the right to *demand* audiences of the Sovereigns to whom they are accredited, otherwise their presence at foreign courts would be superfluous." He added that he regarded the confusion of two such entirely different matters as the mere pretext for a rupture. Chernuishev could only reply that as the English, Swedish and Danish Ministers had made no difficulty about the visit to Prince George, he hoped the French Court also would yield in this matter to the wishes of His Imperial Majesty, who would take such a condescension as a particular sign of friendship on the part of the most Christian King. But the French Court would *not* yield. Choiseul informed Chernuishev that the French Ambassador was to be recalled from St. Petersburg and a *chargé d'affaires*

(in other words, a third-class Minister who would not be bound by the strict rules of diplomatic etiquette,) appointed in his place. After such a communication from the French Prime Minister, Chernuishev also was constrained to demand his passports. Thus the first fruits of Peter's policy was an open rupture with France.

All the more reason was there, therefore, for Russia to preserve friendly relations with Great Britain. Golitsuin, shortly after communicating Bute's sentiments to his court, had returned home to occupy the post of Vice-Chancellor to which he had been appointed in the last days of Elizabeth, to the alarm and disgust of Frederick II., while Count Vorontsov, a nephew of the Russian Grand-Chancellor, was sent in his stead to London with secret instructions to use every possible means to restore the good understanding between Great Britain and Prussia, to induce the former Power to join the Russo-Prussian League, to expose the treachery of Bute and, above all, to sow dissensions between England and Denmark.

For with the latter power Russia was already on the verge of war. In Denmark the immediate and inevitable result of Peter's accession was a general mobilization of the forces. As Duke of Holstein, Peter had inherited all the grievances of his House against the Danish monarchy and no sooner was he upon the throne than he proceeded to insist upon what he regarded as his rights. Denmark was in real peril. It behoved her, therefore, to be provided against all contingencies, especially as the King of Prussia, from the first, took up an equivocal attitude towards her. On March 11, Baron von Korff, the Russian Ambassador at Copenhagen, received an imperial rescript expressing the surprise and

indignation of Peter at the Danish armaments, which compelled him, he said, formally to demand from the King of Denmark whether he were prepared to satisfy his, Peter's, just claims upon Sleswick, for otherwise he would be compelled to adopt extreme measures to obtain his rights. The Danish Court, in reply, expressed its willingness to remain on friendly terms with all its neighbours and proposed a conference at Hamburg or Lübeck to settle its differences with Russia. In the meantime the English and Prussian ministers, Keith and Von Goltz, did everything in their power to keep Peter within due bounds. Neither Great Britain nor Prussia desired a Russo-Danish war which would seriously have interfered with their plans. The former Power needed every ship she possessed for the naval war with France and Spain, whilst Frederick was much disturbed at the prospect of an outbreak of hostilities in Holstein, first because he was now bound by treaty to participate therein, and secondly because he dreaded Peter's departure from Russia while his throne was still so unstable. He was not averse from sending to St. Petersburg ribbons and orders and even diamond tiaras; but he winced at the idea of expending a single Pomeranian soldier in Peter's private service. Both the British and the Prussian Ministers at St. Petersburg became therefore peace-makers for the nonce. On April 16th, Peter suddenly asked Keith what were England's intentions in case of a war between Russia and Denmark. The English Ambassador at once seized his opportunity.[1] He dexterously insinuated that the way of

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. Mss.* 30,999, f. 11, *etc.*

negotiation was preferable and more honourable than the way of arms, as being a proof of his Majesty's moderation and love of justice. Surely, a few villages or bailliages, more or less, were no object to an Emperor of Russia! Goltz kept harping on the same string, remarking that it would be more dignified to sacrifice any petty bit of territory that Peter might wrest from Denmark in order to deserve the greater glory of being the Pacificator of the North. But Peter's friends were soon to discover, to their consternation, that on the Holstein question he meant to have his own way, and that even the admonitions of his oracle, the King of Prussia, were powerless to restrain him when his hereditary Duchy was concerned. At first, however, he seemed to yield. A second rescript of June 3rd, almost the last public document issued by him, informed Von Korff that the Russian Emperor had accepted the proposal for a Peace Conference which was to be held at Berlin, under the mediation of the King of Prussia, to adjust Peter's differences with Denmark; but the Russian propositions were to be regarded as an ultimatum, the rejection whereof would *ipso facto* dissolve the Conference. The Danish Court, anxious to gain time, agreed to this, and the Court of Berlin was delighted at the ease with which this diplomatic dispute seemed to have been adjusted.[1] Goltz was now confident of peace, as, with the best will in the world, the Conference could not meet till August, and before that time many things might have happened. Much hope, moreover, was placed upon the second Russian plenipoten-

[1] Solovev, *Istoria Rossii*, Peter III.

tiary, the Holsteiner, Count Saldern, who was known to be devoted to Prussia. Nevertheless, as we shall see presently, the absolutely incalculable Tsar had a disagreeable surprise in store for his Prussian friends.

Poland-Saxony, being the weakest member of the Anti-Prussian League, was, naturally, more disturbed than the other Allies by the sudden change in Russia's foreign policy. Poland in particular feared everything from this unexampled close alliance between Russia and Prussia. It appeared to the Saxon statesmen that one of Peter's first acts would be to place his uncle, Prince George of Holstein, on the throne of Courland. Courland, in fact, was a sort of miniature Poland exposed to the influence of the first strong power who might think it worth while to interfere in her domestic affairs, and the Courlanders, though nominally under the suzerainty of Poland, had for long come to regard their Dukes as Russian Governors. Poland therefore might be pardoned for apprehending danger from this *rapprochement* between the King of Prussia and the Tsar.

Even at Stambul the consequences of the Russo-Prussian Alliance were distinctly felt. Frederick at first professed to have great hopes of an armed intervention of the Turks in his favour. Rexin, his minister at Constantinople, was authorized to spend as much as a million rixdalers to purchase the friendship of the Porte, and three wagon-loads of presents for the leading Pachas slowly wended their way to the Golden Horn *via* Poland and Moldavia. A treaty was to be obtained binding the Turks to break with Austria during the spring, and direct their operations against Transylvania and the Banat, which Frederick opined could easily

be conquered. Peter, regardless of the actually existing anti-Turkish treaty between Russia and Austria, was willing to go all lengths in the matter to oblige his royal friend. On April 4th his favourite, Gudovich, actually brought Vorontsov an Ukaz, signed by the Emperor, directing Obryezkov, the Russian minister at the Porte, to insinuate that if Turkey were now to seize her opportunity of commencing hostilities against Austria, the Tsar would in no way interfere. This scandalous document was so obviously inspired by the Prusiaks, that Vorontsov not only plucked up sufficient courage to lay it aside for three days, but when pressed by Goltz to communicate it direct to the Porte, absolutely refused to do so. It must, he said, be delivered by the Russian Minister at Stambul in the usual way. Vorontsov, moreover, took the opportunity of reminding Goltz that there was actually in existence a perpetual defensive alliance between the Courts of St. Petersburg and Vienna against the Turks. Meanwhile Frederick, informed beforehand by Goltz, of the existence of this Ukaz, instructed Rexin to tell the Grand Vizier that he had Peter's own assurance of Russia's neutrality in case Turkey were to invade Austria. Now, therefore, was the time for 6000 Tartars to ravage Hungary, and General Werner was ready to start with 13,000 Prussians for Kaschau to direct the raid. Negotiations were simultaneously entered into with the Khan of the Crimea, through Boscamp, the Prussian Resident at Bagcheserai,[1] and an itinerant Jewish chapman, Aaron Zadick, to bring about a Tartar invasion of Hungary indepen-

[1] *Poll. Corr.*, 1762.

dently of the Porte, on condition that Frederick contributed to bring about an amiable settlement of certain territorial disputes between the Khan and the Tsar. Nevertheless, all these more or less chimerical projects came to nothing. Obryezkov, the Russian minister at the Porte, proved more than a match for Rexin. He easily persuaded the Reis Effendi that Prussia was trying to make a cat's-paw of the Porte. On May 30th he had the satisfaction of informing his Government that the projected Prusso-Turkish Alliance had collapsed. Turkey, indeed, had neither the power nor the will to make a diversion against Austria in the interests of Prussia, especially now that the latter Power was so closely allied with Russia, the most dangerous neighbour of the Ottoman Empire. At last Frederick himself began to recognise that the Turkish Alliance was a mere dream. "My hope of making the Turks act in Hungary," he wrote to Goltz on June 11th, "has almost completely vanished."

Thus the new diplomacy so disastrously inaugurated by Peter III. had already alienated the Allies of Russia, strengthened the hands of her natural enemies, and instead of making for a general pacification, had introduced fresh discords into European politics. But it was to do much more than this. For Peter's policy was not merely a blunder, it was an arbitrary reversal of the patriotic system which had steadily been pursued by the best heads in Russia ever since the days of Peter the Great.

After the collapse of the Swedish Empire in the second decade of the 18th century, Russian statesmen had begun to consider themselves safe from danger in the West. Nothing was now to be feared from a diminished Sweden and a moribund

Poland, while the Austrian Alliance guaranteed them against the attacks of the Turk. All the other enemies of Russia, including France, were too remote to be very dangerous, and the perennial struggle with France was confined entirely within the diplomatic arena. But in the middle of the 18th century this happy security had suddenly vanished. The new-born Kingdom of Prussia, hitherto playing but a subordinate part in European politics, now came to the front under the adventurous guidance of a Prince not over scrupulous in his regard for treaties, not too respectful of the rights of other Princes. This potent and erratic constellation speedily attracted Sweden, Poland and Turkey into its political orbit and thus, from the first, Prussia's interests naturally clashed with those of Russia. To resist this restless, disquieting interloper had ever been the aim of Russia's greatest statesmen, and it was with this object in view that even the naturally pacific Elizabeth had thought it necessary to participate in the league against Prussia. And at last, after five years of costly, almost ruinous warfare, the King of Prussia had been reduced to the last extremity, an honourable and even lucrative peace was within the grasp of Russia and her strenuous efforts were on the point of being rewarded by the acquisition of the Province of East Prussia, actually in her grasp and abandoned as lost by Frederick II. himself. It was then that Peter III. ascended the throne. Never before had any Russian Sovereign had such an opportunity of playing the part of armed mediator of the peace of Europe and winning, at the same time, the gratitude and the respect of his own subjects. He had but to follow the wise example of the English Ministry, he had but frankly to recognise the necessity

of forcing Frederick to satisfy the demands of the Allies within reasonable limits, and the double glory of terminating the bloodiest war of the 18th century and consolidating the power of Russia in Europe would have been his for all time. But what had he done? He had hastened to conclude a barren and dishonourable peace which made light of all Russia's past sacrifices, subordinated her political interests to the interests of a hostile Power, and placed her beneath a foreign yoke the like of which she had never felt before. For even the statesmen of foreign origin who had ruled Russia twenty years earlier, Osterman, Münnich, Biren, Löwenwolde, were, at least, Russian subjects who would never have suffered the Foreign Ministers at St. Petersburg to settle national affairs over their heads, as they were now being settled by the young Prussian Kammerherr, Baron von Goltz, and his satellites. Every Russian who had grown up beneath the sceptre of Elizabeth Petrovna with the proud consciousness that Russia was becoming great and strong, felt it to be an outrage, an abomination, that a foreign Ambassador should actually direct and control the foreign policy of the Russian Empire!—a thing absolutely without a precedent in the darkest days of the Tartar Bashkaks. Nay, the Tartar domination itself was more tolerable than the domination of the Prussians and the Prusiaks, inasmuch as an involuntary is far less shameful than a voluntary servitude.

To the honour of contemporary Russian statesmen, not one of them, with the single exception of the comparatively insignificant favourite, Andrei Gudovich, Frederick II.'s dove with the olive-branch, could reconcile himself to this anomalous state of things, yet none of them had sufficient

THE GRAND CHANCELLOR
COUNT MICHAEL LARIONOVICH VORONTSOV.

influence, or sufficient courage, effectually to protest against such a prostitution of the honour of Russia. The position of the Grand-Chancellor, Count Michael Vorontsov, was peculiarly deplorable. Every eye was turned upon *him.* Everyone demanded why *he* did not interfere with his counsels and representations, why he of all men subscribed his name to documents he abominated. That Vorontsov lacked strength of character and that virile pugnacity which goes to the making of a true statesman, cannot be denied; yet something may be pleaded in his excuse. For the last four months he had been incapacitated by a peculiarly enervating malady, and then too, his financial embarrassments made him dependent to a great extent on the bounty of the Emperor. An honest, disinterested man himself, with no very expensive tastes, except a passion for collecting curios, he was burdened with an extravagant wife and had very slender private means, while his official salary was ludicrously inadequate. In March he was forced to petition Peter for assistance and was allowed to borrow 300,000 rubles, without interest, from the newly established Copper Bank to enable him to discharge his liabilities. Thus downright poverty compelled him to keep his place, although he had long since been bitterly conscious of the fact that he now occupied the subaltern position of a mere foreign-office chief-clerk. Nevertheless, Vorontsov resisted the influence of the Prusiaks as far as he dared. In a memorandum which he presented to Peter on Feb. 2nd, he reminded his master that Russia had embarked in the Seven Years' War to keep the King of Prussia within due bounds and to fulfil her own obligations to the Court of Vienna, and that

though peace was desirable, it must be both a stable and a satisfactory peace. He also patriotically protested against the abolition of the old Elizabethan *Konferents* or Council of State by the Ukaz of Feb. 8, as premature. He was only too well aware that this august body was offensive to the new monarch simply because it happened to be the chief seat of the opposition to Prussia. During the four months which elapsed between the abolition of the *Konferents* and the institution of a new Council of State, on May 8, Goltz was practically the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Vorontsov pathetically complained to Mercy and Breteuil that he was actually unaware of the exact state, or stage, of current political business.

And if the Grand-Chancellor was ignorant of the more important affairs of state, still less informed was the Vice-Chancellor, Prince Alexius Mikhailovich Golitsuin, who had just been recalled from London to occupy that important post. On arriving at St. Petersburg, in the middle of May, Golitsuin at once took up a cautiously observant attitude which was very irritating to the Foreign Ministers. Vorontsov, only too glad to have a colleague in his isolation, supported Golitsuin with an emphasis scarcely to be expected from a person of his weakness of character, but as his own slender credit was steadily diminishing, his patronage was of very little service to his brother-diplomatist.

No one during the last years of the last reign had possessed a greater influence on the conduct of foreign affairs than Elizabeth's latest favourite, Count Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov. His name had appeared below that of Vorontsov in most of the imperial rescripts and ukazes, and he was generally regarded,

both at home and abroad, as the right hand of the Chancellor. During the present reign he was relegated to the very subordinate department of Education, and though he affected to be glad of the opportunity of returning to his literary studies, and even circulated a story that he had begged Peter III. on his knees to relieve him of all his public functions, he was naturally by no means pleased to be altogether eclipsed by the Prusiaks. Latterly he had kept away from Court altogether, and was regarded by the Prussian Party as a dangerous intriguer.

The only Russian who really had a word to say in affairs was Secretary Volkov. No other Russian Minister's character has been more virulently assailed by contemporary diplomatists. Keith describes him as a very sad fellow, sold to the French, but with good parts, bold and active and "really the first minister at present."[1] Volkov's influence has been greatly exaggerated, yet he was adroit enough to make himself indispensable to Peter III. No one could draft a memorandum or draw up a ukaz so skilfully as he, and as Peter required his services at all hours of the day and night, he was accommodated with apartments close to those of his master with whom he used to hold after-supper conferences, generally at 2 o'clock in the morning, as already mentioned, at which Von Goltz was nearly always present. The degree of Volkov's importance may be measured by the fact that repeated but always ineffectual efforts were made by the Anti-Prussian Ministers at St. Petersburg to waylay the elusive secretary; but there is not a scrap of evidence to shew that

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. Mss.* 30,999. May 26, 1762.

he ever sold state secrets, or betrayed his country as Dashkova, Pezold, and other irresponsible persons, have so lightly imagined. Indeed, until the arrival of Von Goltz upon the scene, Volkov acted as a sort of brake on Peter's impetuosity, and by judicious procrastination did his best to neutralize the effects of his master's headiness. Perhaps, however, the most striking tribute to his patriotism in these trying times, was the hatred he inspired in Von Goltz and the Prusiaks, who reported again and again to Frederick II., that Volkov was a very dangerous fellow who ought to be suppressed.

As for the little clique of native intriguers who had placed Peter on the throne with the hope of monopolizing his grace and favour, they had already either been disappointed in their calculations and forced to fall back into subordinate positions, or had frankly adopted the rôle of sycophant, ready to endure every insult and humiliation from the hand that fed them. Of these, the Grand-Equerry, Count Leo Narishkin, continued to play the part of Court Buffoon with such boisterous *abandon* that the Tsar could not bear him away from his side for a single day. Glyebov depended less upon his own social qualities, which were indifferent at best, than upon the charms of his niece whom he had placed in the Emperor's household as a sort of mistress in reserve who might one day, perhaps, take the place of "das Fräulein," as Elizabeth Vorontsova, the reigning favourite was generally called. General Melgunov and Count Roman Vorontsov who had anticipated so much from the new reign were now almost lost in the crowd of Prussian and Holstein officers who surrounded Peter wherever he went; but the President of the Senate, the aged Prince

Nikita Trubetskoi, and the elderly Grand-Hetman, Count Cyril Razumovsky, by entering heart and soul into the military crotchets of their master and submitting to unspeakable torments in order to accommodate their stiff and gouty limbs to the rigours of the new Prussian drill, still contrived to keep what they had got, and had a lively hope of getting even more. The Hetman was constantly with the Emperor, and appeared to be his most trusty comrade. Accustomed during the reign of Elizabeth to all the refinements of luxury, surrounded with every imaginable comfort and eager to shine as a "*bon vivant comme il faut*," any violent physical exertion was hateful to this obese voluptuary, and though a Field Marshal he had never so much as handled a spontoon in his life. Now, however, he was obliged to add to his numerous household a young officer well acquainted with the new articles of war and the Prussian exercises, who drilled him privately for two or three hours *per diem*. Unfortunately, the military art is not learnt in a day and the comical clumsiness of Razumovsky on parade was a source of inexhaustible amusement to Peter, who knew his drills by heart and delighted to keep the perplexed and perspiring Grand-Hetman on the trot for hours together. To Trubetskoi, who, at any rate, had had a soldier's training and seen something of warfare (in the commissariat department) under Marshal Münnich [1] the new exercises came somewhat more easily. But he, too, cut a ridiculous figure enough, as the following anecdote of Bolotov's [2] sufficiently proves. One day the Russian Pepys was strolling through

[1] Bain, *Pupils of Peter the Great*, Chap. VII.

[2] Bolotov, *Zapiski*.

the streets of St. Petersburg with his friend Prince Urusov, when he observed, marching at the head of a detachment of the Guards, a fat little man in a smart, tight, close-fitting uniform, with gold facings almost hiding the blue ribbon which he wore beneath it on the breast of his caftan. —"Who is that man?" asked Bolotov.—"Why, don't you know, that is Nikita Yurevich."—"What! Prince Trubetskoi? Lord deliver us! Why, he used to be the Procurator-General."—"Oh, he is that still and very much more besides, for he has lately been made a Field Marshal." —"How can that be? I always thought he was so infirm and crazy on his legs that he could not appear at Court, or even in the Senate for weeks at a time, and even when he was at home scarce anyone could get to see him?"—"Oh!" replied Urusov, "that was in the good old days. Times have changed since then. Now-a-days, well or ill, all our little old men have to lift their gouty legs and march alongside the youngsters and kick up the mud and dirt just like any common soldier."

Nor is this little incident as trivial as it may appear at first sight. Peter's well-meant military reforms and the rigour with which he enforced them contributed largely, if indirectly, to his overthrow. By themselves, no doubt, they would only have produced a little grumbling, but coinciding as they did with a wide-spread dissatisfaction, they precipitated a catastrophe which, from the first, was almost inevitable. For it was not only Peter's doings and his manner of doing them which roused the whole Russian nation against him, but his character was so flighty and erratic as to be quite incalculable. Even his natural partisans

had no sure hold upon him, anything might at any moment be apprehended from so irresponsible a being. Six months of his reign was sufficient to convince every reasonable Russian of the folly of enduring any longer a Ruler whose incurable instability of character had done so much damage in the past and offered no guarantees for the future. Yet, as I will attempt to shew in the following chapter, Peter had many amiable qualities, many excellent intentions, and at least deserved a better fate than was about to be meted out to him.

CHAPTER VII

"OUR DIVINE EMPEROR"

Peter's bad qualities grossly exaggerated—His amiability.—Generosity—Kind treatment of the oppressed—Conscientious discharge of his public duties—Reform of abuses—His accomplishments—And pastimes—His so-called "orgies"—A smoking entertainment at Oranienbaum—Peter's restlessness—Excitability—Want of dignity—Love of practical joking—His military hobbies—Growing unpopularity—Deterioration of character—Offends the Orthodox Church—Russia ripe for revolt.

What crueller fate can be imagined for a man than to be libelled after his death by the very persons who have already had a hand in his murder? Yet such was the fate of the unhappy Prince who, for six short months, ruled Russia as Peter III. His assassins took good care that the world should think as badly of him as possible, and consequently he has gone down to posterity as a brutal, drunken, dissipated blockhead, half idiot, half satyr, incapable not merely of ruling his fellow-men, but even of consorting with them on terms of equality. But a caricature is no true portrait, and many and deplorable as were the weaknesses of Peter III. he was not without good and even noble qualities. Nay, his very admiration for the King of Prussia, extravagant though it might be, showed at any rate that he was not incapable of a disinterested and exalted hero-worship. To begin with,

he had a good heart. On this point all who knew him intimately, and had no motive for blackening his character, are agreed. He was a kind master, a grateful nephew, an indulgent husband under great provocation, and a most generous friend. During his whole reign, with absolute power in his hands, he never committed a single act of cruelty or violence. The English Minister, Robert Keith, sincerely regretted him and even the Princess Dashkova, who hated him with all the fanaticism of a thorough-going partisan of his consort, admits that he always took her frequent impertinences very kindly. To all the political exiles whom he recalled at the beginning of his reign he was more than generous. Biren and Lestocq, both of them now very old men, became his *protégés* and his pensioners, while Münnich, who carried his eighty years lightly, was made one of his chief counsellors. In moments of exasperation, indeed, Peter might order those who offended him to be led out to instant execution; but his anger always vanished as quickly as it arose and he was easily pacified. He had several confidential servants about him whom he had, from time to time, condemned to be hanged for petty offences, and he freely forgave his fat ugly mistress for the vilest reproaches which an angry virago can address to the man she—loves.

Perhaps, however, the most salient instance of his kindliness is his treatment of Prince Ivan, the baby Tsar who had succeeded the Empress Anne in 1746 only to be dethroned 13 months later by the Empress Elizabeth.[1] Ivan had been kept in the most rigorous confinement ever since and had

[1] Bain, *Daughter of Peter the Great,* Chap. II.

grown up an idiot. Peter had been warned by his provident friend, Frederick II., to keep an eye on Ivan as a possible rival; but the Tsar, who was the most unsuspicious of men, pooh-poohed the warning. He often declared that he had views with regard to this poor Prince, and would either give him a military appointment if he found any natural capacity in him, or make his lot easier for him in the future. On March 1st, accompanied by Narishkin, Melgunov, Volkov, Von Korff, the Minister of Police, and a few lacqueys carrying snuff-boxes, watches and other trinkets, Peter departed at break of day[1] for Schlüsselburg, whither Ivan had lately been transferred, to see for himself the condition of "the arrestant." In outward appearance the ex-Emperor was a big, broad-shouldered man of twenty-two, hirsute, unkempt and half-savage-looking. He had scarce a notion of his own identity and was more than half imbecile. The poor creature had evidently been much neglected. The clothes he wore were coarse and dirty; his bed was a common one, and though his prison was spacious enough, it was badly lighted by a single little barred window high up in the thick walls. All that he wanted, he said, was a little fresh air, pathetically adding that he had only noticed quite recently how fresh and nice it was when one of his window-panes was accidentally broken. He also complained with a thick stammer, barely intelligible, that of all the officers who had guarded him, only one, whose name was Korff, had treated him kindly, whereupon Peter, much touched, pressed Korff's hand

[1] For Peter's visit to Ivan see Keith, *Despatches, B. M. MSS.*; Mercy, *Despatches*; Solovev, *Istoria Rossii*; Herrmann, *Geschichte des Russischen Staat.*

by way of shewing his gratitude. The only present which Ivan would accept from the Emperor was a silk dressing-gown, which he put under his pillow to wear against an approaching feast-day. Before departing, Peter ordered a new house to be built for him within the circuit of the fortress where he might have more air and liberty. Very different was the treatment this unhappy prisoner received from Catherine II. On the first faint suspicion of danger from his supposed partisans, he was mysteriously hustled out of the world, if not by her orders, at least with her connivance. But wherever her authority was concerned the great Catherine would never take the slightest risk however remote, though Justice and Humanity might cry out against her.

Of Peter III.'s conscientious discharge of his public duties I have already spoken. In the first four months of his reign his industry and application were extraordinary. For a time he even attempted the impossible task of seeing to everything personally. He took especial interest in commerce and manufactures, and the place he enjoyed visiting the most was the Mint, which he jokingly called his pet manufactory. He certainly cared for the benefit of his subjects, though it was perhaps fortunate for Russia that he did not live long enough to carry out his projected reforms, most of which were due entirely to sudden impulse and therefore possessed no promise of stability. Thus his well-meant efforts to cheapen and accelerate judicial procedure and remove many heavy abuses, by codifying the laws on the Prussian model, failed conspicuously because the whole project was hastily entrusted to unexperienced persons. He was particularly proud of his capital and did his best to

civilize and beautify it, even introducing a new system of police-patrols and street-lighting, which was the only one of his reforms confirmed by his successor. In the fleet also, which during the reign of Elizabeth had sunk to a very low level, Peter III. took the keenest interest. He persuaded many English officers to enter the Russian naval service, removed the chief naval-yards from St. Petersburg to Cronstadt, where shipbuilding was studied on English models, and during his short reign of six months added two first-class men of war to the Russian fleet.

Nor was this poor prince, so hastily dismissed as a mere *crétin*,[1] altogether without some tincture of literary and artistic taste. He spoke Russian fairly, German very well and by preference, and was extraordinarily fluent in French. He also wrote all these languages, though very indifferently. He had a liking for books of travel and all works dealing with the science of war, of which he accumulated a very fine collection. Indeed he took much more interest in his library than is generally supposed, setting aside 7000 rubles per annum for purchases, and marking the trade catalogues, which were regularly sent to him, with his own hand. He would not, however, suffer on his shelves a single book in the Latin language, of which he had a profound detestation. Four of the largest rooms in the new Winter Palace were set apart for his library, not including two separate apartments allotted to a resident librarian.[2]

Of music, Peter III. was somewhat of a *connoisseur*. He

[1] Herzen, for instance, in his preface to Catherine II.'s *Mémoires*.

[2] Then worth about £1750.

[3] Helbig, *Biographie Peters des Dritten*.

played the violin, which he had been taught by an Italian named Pieri, not unskilfully,[1] generally performing for hours at a stretch in the orchestra at the Sunday Court-Concerts which were a regular institution during his reign. He possessed a very valuable collection of fiddles, for some of which he had paid as much as £125 a piece.

But even more than his fiddle he loved his pipe. During the reign of Elizabeth tobacco had been tabooed at Court, and as a youth Peter himself could never endure the weed. But no sooner did he perceive that his Holsteiners, whom he regarded as accomplished men of the world as well as military heroes, were addicted to the habit than he also adopted it. One day when his old tutor Stehlin expressed some surprise at seeing him, for the first time, with a pipe in his mouth, Peter hastily replied: "What is there to be surprised at, blockhead? Did you ever see a brave officer who did *not* smoke?" But here, also, as usual, he went to extremes. Henceforth he was never seen without a pipe, and was always followed by a lacquey carrying a large basket[2] full of long Dutch clays, canaster and other tobaccos for the enjoyment of himself and his comrades, so that, a few moments after the meal was over, the dining-room of Peter III. was generally thick with smoke, in the midst of which His Imperial Majesty might be dimly discerned strutting up and down the room, boisterously laughing, talking and joking as was

[1] Bolotov, who frequently heard Peter play the fiddle and was himself something of a *connoisseur,* remarks [*Zapiski*] that the Emperor played "doval'no khorohso i byeglo" ("pretty well and dexterously"), high praise for him.

[2] Bolotov, *Zapiski.*

his wont. The company would then sit down behind long tables covered with bottles and glasses and abandon themselves to merriment, for it was well understood that the Emperor hated all ceremony and liked to be treated by his guests *en camarade*. "Presently," says prying Bolotov, a horrified yet fascinated spectator of one of these scenes, "presently they would all get up and shout and shriek and laugh and talk nonsense like so many urchins or creatures without reason. And sometimes they would proceed through the balcony to the sand-strewn court beyond and there play about like so many little children, hopping about on one leg, butting at their comrades, kicking their posteriors and bellowing: 'Come along, my brothers! see who will be down first!' Imagine, then, our feelings to see the first men in the Empire, all bedizened with stars and ribbands, butting at and trying to cross-buttock each other! And whenever anyone of them could keep his feet no longer, but fell prone upon the floor, there would be laughter and uproar and shrieking and clapping of hands till the grenadiers came in and carried away the fallen in their arms."[1]

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that Peter himself was a drunkard, despite the legends to that effect industriously insinuated or circulated by Catherine and her accomplices. As a matter of fact, his regular drink was light English ale, or Burgundy and water. Spirits disagreed with him, and he had the good sense to abstain from them altogether while still a youth. Appearances, it is true, were very often against him. He was always, more or less,

[1] Bolotov, *Zapiski*.

in a state of such intense excitement as to seem scarce responsible for his actions; but this was due, not to excess in drink, as many hastily supposed, but to what the Saxon minister Brühl rightly calls "the vivacity of his disordered noddle."[1] The slightest opposition would often utterly discompose him, and then he would scream with his peculiar strident voice and gesticulate like one possessed. In such a condition he might, very easily, be taken for tipsy. Yet his excitement always subsided as quickly as it arose, and it is a fact that he did most of his cabinet work between one and two in the morning after his so-called "orgies" were over. His abnormal restlessness points indeed to chronic cerebral excitement. He could rarely sleep more than two or three hours out of the twenty-four, though every moment of his time during the long day was fully occupied. It is but fair to add, too, that the bear-garden tom-foolery above described was generally confined to the Pavilion at Oranienbaum, where his Imperial Majesty condescended to unbend in the society of his faithful Holsteiners.[2] At the more ceremonious, after-dinner entertainments at the Winter Palace, or the Château of Peterhof, when ladies were present, the favourite amusement was the round game of cards called *campis* already described. The Princess Dashkova sneers at this game as at every other pastime of Peter's; but Bolotov, a much more reliable authority, who also saw it played, was so delighted at the sight that he ventured close up to the card-table and no doubt had the satisfaction of seeing His Imperial Majesty, who was in

[1] "Die regsamkeit seines wüsten Kopfes."

[2] "His ragamuffin generals," as Dashkova unkindly calls them.

high good humour that day, cheat egregiously by sweeping the stakes into his own pocket and flinging the counters at the heads of the gentlemen whom he honoured with his familiarity, which was one of his playful ways of adding to the hilarity of the evening. There certainly was no haughtiness about Peter III.

In another place Bolotov complains that Peter admitted to his society persons unworthy of the intimacy of an Emperor, such as Italian opera-singers, actors and actresses, and that he freely "blabbed out" state secrets among such company. This scandal, he says, reached at last the ears of the common people and excited general disgust. "It made our hearts bleed to see our Emperor demeaning himself so," adds the patriotic chronicler. It was to scenes like this, no doubt, that Count Mercy is alluding when he talks of Peter's "undignified proceedings," "absurd and vicious behaviour," and informs Maria Theresa that the company met with at the Russian Court was no better than what one generally meets in the street. That Peter preferred low company, possibly because he could not hope to shine in any other, is true enough. He had no sense whatever of dignity or reticence, and liked to be on perfectly free and easy terms with those whom he honoured with his favour. He would shout and laugh and even protrude his tongue (a favourite witticism) in the presence of the Foreign Ministers without a thought of the horrible indecorum of his behaviour, and if anything in the appearance of those about him struck him as odd or ridiculous, he would jeer at them utterly regardless of their feelings. The antics of the gouty old generals who tried to curry

favour by learning the new Prussian exercises afforded him inexhaustible amusement, and he laughed uproariously whenever the poor old court-ladies vainly tried to bend their stiff limbs in imitation of the new French courtesy which he took it into his head to introduce. One of these ladies, the aged Countess Zagryazhka, has recorded her impression of this rude behaviour. "I was much ridiculed," she says, "the Gosudar[1] laughing at me personally with all sorts of odd grimaces. He was not like a Gosudar at all." Peter the Great, indeed, was also a buffoon. Peter the Great loved to smoke and drink in the congenial fellowship of his cronies and his doxies. Peter the Great was not over particular as to the quality of his jokes, and sundry of his private entertainments were both blasphemous and indecent. But Peter the Great never betrayed state secrets to his boon companions. Peter the Great never allowed his private pastimes to interfere with his public duties. Above all, the honour and welfare of Russia were dear to his heart, and to have sacrificed either the one or the other to any considerations whatever, would have been regarded by him as the blackest of crimes.

And it was the peculiar fate of Peter III. most to offend where he meant most to benefit. Like his grandfather he was keenly alive to the importance of possessing an efficient and highly-disciplined army, indeed his fondness for military affairs amounted almost to a mania, he was never happy unless he was drilling or manœuvring his troops. It is also indisputable that he introduced several salutary reforms, and

[1] The Sovereign, or Autocrat.

did away with much of the carelessness and slovenliness which had spread far and wide in the army under the happy-go-lucky system, or want of system, of Elizabeth's later years. Now one of the crying abuses of the day was the position assumed by the Body Corps of the Preobrazhensky Guards which twenty years before had placed Elizabeth Petrovna on the throne and had been rewarded by that bountiful Princess with an injudicious liberality which had made it a useless burden to the Treasury and a standing menace to the Capital. Peter, while Grand-Duke, had often expressed the opinion that this pampered and licentious corps was as dangerous to St. Petersburg as the Janissaries were to Stambul, and one of his first acts was to cashier it. Had he stopped there nobody would have thought of blaming him, but, immediately afterwards, he had the incredible folly to substitute in its place a Holstein Cuirassier Regiment to which he gave the name of Body Guard of the Imperial Household, to the intense indignation of all patriotic Russians. Peter even intended to abolish the Russian Guards altogether and distribute them among the line regiments, but he did not live long enough to carry out his intention.

The introduction of the Prussian army-regulations and uniforms naturally gave still greater offence, though even these novelties were not without their advantages. Peter had, at least, so much of a soldier's instinct as to prefer simplicity and neatness to mere empty display. As Von Korff, the Minister of Police, once remarked to Bolotov: "Recollect that our new master has a great liking for neatness and smartness and would have all his officers in close-fitting, spick and span uniforms." In the beginning of his

reign Peter generally went about in the red and green uniform of the Preobrazhenksy Guards, with a golden sash, or else in a simple green jacket without any ornament. Towards the end of his reign, however, he was most frequently dressed in the uniform of a Prussian Colonel of the Guards. Though he had neither the courage nor the ability to make a good soldier, he was, at least, an excellent drill-master and, as already mentioned, a great part of his time was spent on the parade-ground where he made his soldiers practise the new Prussian exercises for hours at a time, frequently enforcing his precepts with the little cane which he always carried in his hand. No officer was ever excused from attendance on these occasions, and generals, and even field-marshals, who had never held a demi-pike in their hands before, were obliged to turn out at the head of their regiments, whatever the weather, to their intense distress and indignation. Twenty-four useless generals were cashiered without a retiring pension, and one hundred and thirty of the more capable members of the corps of cadets received commissions. The whole army in fact was to be reorganised on the Prussian model. The regiments were no longer, as of old, named after their towns or districts, but after the names of their colonels, and the soldiers were, in future, to be chastised with rods or canes instead of with the more brutal knout, though even this innovation, as being contrary to custom, was resented in some quarters. On state occasions all Russian officers were expected to appear in brand-new uniforms embellished with shoulder-straps, *chevrons*, and gold knots. Bolotov could scarce recognize the be-powdered, newly furbished up Guards when he first saw them, and the quantity of silver

on their new uniforms filled him with amazement. Though he himself was only an officer in a line regiment, his new uniform, which his chief told him was indispensable, cost him £25. At the beginning of his reign, Peter was content to wear the broad blue ribbon of the Order of St. Andrew, which is to a Russian what the Order of the Garter is to us; but when, towards the end of his reign, he received the long-coveted Order of the Black Eagle from the King of Prussia, he openly declared his intention of wearing no other decoration, not even the Polish White Eagle, which up to that time had been very highly esteemed in Russia. Moreover, he celebrated his investiture with a cannonade from the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul which lasted all day. The simultaneous appointment of Prince George of Holstein as a Field Marshal, with a pension of £10,000 a year, and precedence over all his seniors of the same rank, naturally did not tend to make these foreign reforms any more popular, despite the fact that three Russian Generals were decorated with the blue ribbon at the same time.

Peter's ostentatiously expressed preference for the orange ribbon of the Black Eagle was not the only outward and visible sign of his infatuation for the King of Prussia. At banquets and other public entertainments, where it might have been supposed that the duty of reticence would be obvious even to a prince of the Tsar's mental capacity, Peter lost no opportunity of exalting his idol in the presence of the Ambassadors of the Powers who had suffered most from the rapacity of Frederick II. On one occasion he declared that he could not conceive how it was that everyone was

so set against the King of Prussia. On another he bitterly inveighed against the mode in which, as he said, Austria had exploited the troops of her Russian Ally, adding that it would take him years of careful nursing to repair the damage done. On a third occasion he shewed the company a ring he had on his finger containing a portrait of Frederick, at the same time protesting that he esteemed it the most precious of his possessions. Moreover, whilst frequently jeering at Loudon and the other Austrian generals as a pack of fools and cowards, he could not allude to the Prussian officers without an outburst of emotion, and as for Frederick he vowed that he regarded his will as the will of God and was ready to fight Hell itself on his behalf.

There is, however, a pretty general concensus of opinion that Peter's character steadily deteriorated during the course of his six months' reign and that he was not the same man at the end of it as he was at the beginning. This was due, I think, not, as Keith supposes, to the corrupting influence of bad company, but simply to the unceasing wear and tear of intense excitement on a brain predisposed to failure. The frail and defective machine, suddenly exposed to an over-stress of work, was about to run down. According to the Saxon Minister, Brühl, the commencement of this mental and moral collapse coincided with the migration of the Emperor into the new Winter Palace, a spacious and magnificent building which dominated the capital and was visible miles away. During the first four months of 1762 gangs of labourers, working night and day, had been engaged in its completion, and Peter and his Court, including the establishments of his consort, his mistress and his infant

son, the Grand-Duke Paul, moved into it on Holy Saturday, which fell that year on April 15. The occasion was marked by an imposing reception at which the chief dignitaries of the Empire assembled to congratulate the Tsar upon his change of domicile, and the number, variety and brilliance of the new uniforms, now worn for the first time, filled with amazement those accustomed to the simple blue and green uniforms of the last reign. Yet there was one serious omission in these festivities which painfully impressed all ranks and classes. The open-air religious processions, usual at Easter-tide were omitted. Nay, more, it was whispered among the clergy and people that the Emperor was a pagan, or, still worse, a Protestant. He never fasted, never communicated, rarely attended Divine service, openly expressed his contempt for the Orthodox Church, her ceremonies and her ministrations, and ridiculed her priests in the most grotesque and offensive manner. He had declared to the Archbishop of Novgorod that he intended to set up a Protestant chapel at Court for the use of his Lutheran domestics, and when the Metropolitan declared that the Russian clergy would rather be extirpated than submit to the establishment of Protestantism among them, the Tsar overwhelmed the venerable Prelate with abuse, told him he was an old fool and protested that a religion which was good enough for the dominions of the King of Prussia would do very well in Russia.

Thus, not content with setting aside his own Ministers in favour of Prussian interlopers, not content with alienating the army by injudicious reforms, Peter blindly braved the enmity of the Russian clergy, an enmity none the less formidable

because it operated in secret, undermining, gradually but effectually, that innate popular veneration for the sacrosanct person of the Tsar which is the secret of the strength of Russian autocracy. We can well believe Bolotov, therefore, when he tells us that towards the end of Peter's short reign the general discontent was no longer a timid whisper, but an audacious clamour. It only needed a pretext, an opportunity, for bursting forth, and the infatuated Emperor himself supplied this opportunity by now endeavouring to saddle his exhausted country with a frivolous war after bestowing upon her the doubtful benefit of an inglorious peace.

CHAPTER VIII

PETER'S QUARREL WITH DENMARK

Peter's accession a menace to Denmark—Denmark deserted by her Allies—Treachery of Austria—Casper von Saldern—Keith and Saldern for peace—Ambiguous attitude of Frederick II.—He espouses Peter's quarrel—Cautions Peter against the Russians—Peace Conference at Berlin—Relative military strength of Russia and Denmark—The Hamburg incident—Fury of Peter—Advance of the opposing forces—The war suddenly stopped by the Revolution of July at St. Petersburg.

Hitherto Peter had proved a pliable tool enough in the hands of the Prussians and the Prusiaks, but now, they also were to have an unpleasant experience of his incalculable, his invincible obstinacy. For all its intensity Peter's infatuation for the King of Prussia was overborne by a still more violent passion—hatred of Denmark. This was so notorious throughout Europe that while Peter's accession was regarded by the Danish Government as tantamount to a declaration of hostilities, all the Powers actually engaged in the German War endeavoured to make political capital out of the new Emperor's political crotchets with a cynical disregard of existing treaties unexampled even in the sordid record of Eighteenth Century diplomacy. The dispute turned upon the ownership of North Sleswick, which under the Treaties of 1720, 1732 and 1734 had been formally guaranteed to

Denmark by England, France, Austria and Sweden.[1] All these guarantors now hastened to repudiate the obligations they had contracted for fear of offending Peter III. The Swedish Chancellor, Count Ekeblad, declared that in view of the exhaustion of his country he was constrained to "keep on friendly terms with everyone till the sky cleared again." The French Government excused itself on the plea of financial embarrassment, England declared that her position would not permit her to participate in "these unhappy hostilities" (war between Russia and Denmark had, by that time, actually begun) except by offering her good services, in plain English she intended to remain neutral. But worse than all was the position assumed by the Court of Vienna. In the opinion of the Austrian Ministers the best way to make a good impression upon Peter III. was to sacrifice Denmark to his vengeance. Although Kaunitz understood perfectly well that it was contrary to Austria's true interests to allow Russia to overwhelm Denmark, he was nevertheless ready to win the good-will of Peter III. by granting him subsidies for conducting a war against Frederick V., a policy which amounted to treachery of the basest kind when we recollect that the Court of Vienna had not only guaranteed North Sleswick to Denmark by the Treaty of 1734, but had even promised, by the supplementary Treaty of 1738, to adjust to the advantage of the Danish crown the perennial dispute with the Duke of Holstein concerning the Gottorp lands.[2] The intentions of Austria were well known to the Danish

[1] Holm, *Danmark-Norges Historie under Frederik V. Afdel. I*, Chaps. 14—15.

[2] Holm.

Government, but it rested its hopes on the maintenance of peace on the efforts of Mr. Robert Keith, the English Ambassador at St. Petersburg, and of Casper von Saldern, the chief of Peter III.'s Holstein counsellors, who stood high in his confidence. This man, who had already occupied many posts of trust in the Duchy and was destined at a later day, in Poland, to prove one of the ablest, if one of the most unscrupulous, of Russia's diplomatists, was a person of uncommon energy and ability, crafty or violent as it served his turn, and highly esteemed not only by all the foreign Ambassadors at St. Petersburg, but also by so good a judge as Frederick II. of Prussia. For Russia's interests at that time he cared not a jot, but he was patriotic in his calculating way and quite convinced that Holstein would be much better off as an independent Duchy than as a mere appanage of Russia. It was due to the efforts of Keith and Saldern, who won over Prince George of Holstein to their side and worked in concert with the Danish Minister, Haxthausen, that Peter was induced to keep quiet for a time. They flattered him first of all with the prospect of posing as the peace-maker of Europe, arguing dexterously that there would be plenty of time to deal with Denmark when the political atmosphere had cleared. Saldern insinuated, moreover, that, in view of the distance between Russia and Holstein, a war with Denmark would be attended with great difficulties and require an army of at least 100,000 men. But the time came when Peter's passionate hatred grew so strong that it was beyond the power of Keith and Saldern to restrain it any longer. At first Peter had seemed inclined to be content with the restitution by Denmark of the town

of Sleswick, and was even prepared to renounce his claims upon the Bishopric of Lübeck; but soon his demands became more and more exorbitant till, at last, he would be put off with nothing less than the whole of South Sleswick and the bailiwicks of Ploen and Segeberg. This change of front coincided with the signature of the treaty with Prussia, and to no small extent was due to the influence and the suggestions of Frederick II.

During the last days of the reign of the Empress Elizabeth, Frederick II. had been on the most friendly terms with Denmark, even going as far as to accept the offer of an offensive and defensive alliance with that kingdom. But no sooner had Peter III. ascended the throne than all thought of a Prusso-Danish Alliance disappeared. The accession of his worshipper not only saved Frederick II. from destruction, but won him a fresh ally in his struggle with Austria. It is true that the prospect of an actual rupture between Russia and Denmark was by no means agreeable to the King of Prussia, inasmuch as he would then have been bound to take part in it as an active ally of the former, and, besides, Prussia, in common with the other great Powers, would rather have seen Holstein a province of Denmark than a political outpost of the Tsar. But just as Austria's dread of Prussia made her repudiate her obligations to Denmark, so again Frederick's desire of vengeance upon Austria at any cost, drove him to support Peter's anti-Danish policy *à outrance*. "Under my present circumstances," he wrote to Goltz, "I must plunge blindly into all the Emperor's views." Accordingly he represented to Peter, through Goltz, that Bernstroff and Moltke, the leading

statesmen at Copenhagen, were so nervous and timorous (a statement which, as he well knew, was diametrically contrary to the facts)[1] that they would never dare to attack Russia. "Your Majesty will be able to do with the Danes what you will," he wrote. At the same time he told Peter that his cause was just; exhorted him not to be afraid either of France or of Sweden; kept him constantly informed of what the Danes were doing, and suggested the best plan of campaign for speedily breaking down their resistance. Nay, he promised to help Peter against them in every possible way, even to the extent of leading an auxiliary contingent in person against "the common foe" if circumstances should demand it. Nothing, of course, could be more pleasing to Peter than to hear such language from the mouth of his oracle; but, on the other hand, nothing was more likely to make him proceed to extremities against Denmark. Thus it came about that Frederick II. overreached himself and at last found it impossible to stop the incalculable and impetuous force which he had set in motion. For, eagerly as he had egged Peter on to press to the uttermost his claims against Denmark, it had by no means been his intention to bring about an open rupture between Peter III. and Frederick V. till he had thoroughly exploited the Russian troops in his own quarrel with Austria. The only thing now to be done, therefore, was to warn Peter to take every precaution before his departure for the seat of war, if go he must. "Frankly, I distrust these Russians of yours," wrote Frederick to Peter on May 1st,[2] "any other people

[1] Haxthausen, *Despatches*, cited by Holm.

[2] *Pol. Corr.*

would thank Heaven for so excellent and admirable a Prince, but I fear me that the cursed venality of a few individuals may induce them to revolt in favour of the Brunswick Princes.[1] What, if during your absence, a cabal were formed to dethrone your Majesty?" He then advised Peter in the event of his departure from Russia, to take all suspected persons along with him, including the Foreign Ministers ("thereby removing from Russia all the seeds of rebellion and intrigue"); intern them at Wismar or Rostock and leave the capital in the charge of his faithful Holsteiners and Livonians.

But the infatuated Emperor was neither to be cajoled nor persuaded. His belief in himself was absolutely boundless. In his reply to Frederick of May 17th,[2] after assuring him that Prince Ivan was well guarded, he thus proceeds: "If the Russians had wanted to do me any harm, they could have done it long ago, seeing that I take no particular precautions, always committing myself to God's keeping and going freely about the streets on foot. I assure your Majesty that when once one knows how to deal with the Russians one can be quite sure of them, and then, too, your Majesty, what would these same Russians think of me if they saw me remain *au logis*, while there was war in my native land, they who have always desired a man for their master instead of a woman, as I have heard the soldiers of my own regiment say twenty times over? Should I not have to reproach myself ever afterwards with an act of bare poltroonery and die of very grief for it?" Brave words

[1] *I.e.* Prince Ivan and his brothers and sisters.

[2] *Pol. Corr.*

these! Unhappily there was nothing brave or manly behind them as the event was to shew. Naturally, after this, any further remonstrance would only have damaged the Prussian cause at St. Petersburg.

Nevertheless, Peter was persuaded to try the way of negotiation first of all. Von Korff, the Russian minister at Copenhagen, and Saldern were his chosen representatives. So far as he was concerned, indeed, the whole negotiation was a mere pretence, for he had already (May 5) not only concluded peace with Prussia, but, shortly afterwards (June 19) entered into a definitive alliance with that Power. A separate article in this treaty bound the King of Prussia to use his best efforts to obtain an acknowledgment of Peter's claims on Sleswick from Denmark, in the first instance by energetic representations at Copenhagen, and then, if these proved ineffectual, by force of arms. Nay, Frederick even guaranteed to Peter any territorial accretions he might wrest from Denmark in the course of the war. The consequence was that Peter was now less than ever inclined to abate any of his claims upon Denmark. He selected Berlin as the seat of the peace-conference and appointed the King of Prussia his mediator. He also insisted that the terms to be submitted by him to the conference should be regarded as an ultimatum, so that in case they were not accepted *in toto* the negotiations might be broken off at once. What he now demanded, moreover, was not only that portion of Sleswick which had formerly belonged to the House of Gottorp, but the royal portion of Sleswick likewise. Under these circumstances there seemed to be no room for a mediator, and indeed the Emperor had very good reason

to count upon the good offices of Frederick II. who had already secretly instructed Finckenstein, the Prussian delegate at the conference, to support the Russian delegates throughout. But the Danish ministers, on the other hand, were under no delusion as to the issue of the conference. It was evident that this quarrel could only be settled by the sword. All they now wanted was to gain a little more time. The result of the struggle could scarcely be doubtful. At sea, it is true, the Danes were vastly superior to the Russians. The Russian Navy during the reign of Elizabeth had been shamefully neglected and, according to Mercy, consisted in the middle of May 1762, of eighteen ships of the line of from 50 to 80 guns apiece in such a bad condition that there was no possibility of the Russian fleet putting to sea until the end of the summer. The Danish fleet, on the other hand, was excellently equipped and the squadron of 14 ships of the line and 8 frigates cruising in the Baltic under Admiral Fontenay was quite sufficient to blockade the Russian Fleet, especially as Sweden had consented to observe a benevolent neutrality. Possessing the command of the sea, moreover, the Danish Government was able to prevent the Russians from supplying their army in North Germany with muniments of war by the shortest route. In fact, the Russian Commander-in-Chief, Rumyantsev, wrote about this time to Peter complaining that lack of provisions was driving him to despair. Nevertheless, at Copenhagen, there was the not unfounded apprehension that the good-will of Frederick II. might help Russia over this difficulty, and in that case Denmark would be seriously threatened from the land side, inasmuch as the Russians, with Prussian

connivance, could easily cross the northern border of Denmark with a force, not, perhaps, numerically stronger than the army which the Danish Government could oppose to it, but infinitely superior as a fighting-machine, inasmuch as it was largely composed of veterans who had learnt their business during five years of active warfare against the greatest captain of the age.

Meanwhile the Russian army was assembling round Colberg in Prussian Pomerania, which the Russians had captured during the Seven Years' War. In accordance with the treaty which Frederick II. had just concluded with them, this fortress had been retroceded to him, though he was obliged to let Peter III. use it as a base for his operations. Here, in the beginning of July, assembled 40,000 men under the command of Count Peter Aleksandrovich Rumyantsev, Russia's greatest general. The financial embarrassment with which Denmark had to contend now induced her Government to take a step which even Bernstorff, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, admitted to be "an unpleasant necessity." Denmark had been negotiating with the free City of Hamburg for a loan, but the Hamburgers, doubtful of the security and fearful of the contingent vengeance of the Russian troops during their forthcoming march through northern Germany, had declined to part with their money. But so urgent were the necessities of the Danish Government that they could take no denial and accordingly a considerable division of the Danish Army was ordered to proceed to Hamburg forthwith, to support a renewed application on the part of Denmark for a loan of a million rix-dollars. To this pressure the Hamburgers were obliged to yield, especially as the conditions of the loan

were, after all, highly favourable to them.[1] But the whole transaction, however prettily disguised, could not be made to look well, even on paper, and produced a very unfavourable impression both in England and Prussia. When tidings thereof reached St. Petersburg, Peter III. was so infuriated that he would not even await the result of the Berlin Conference which was to have held its first session on July 12, but at once (July 6) sent orders to Rumyantsev to advance through Swedish Pomerania and Mecklenburg into Denmark. He himself proposed to set out for the front a few days later.

Forty-eight hours after the Hamburg affair had, from the Danish point of view, been satisfactorily settled, the Danish Army, about 27,000 strong, under the command of the Count de St. Germaine, the ablest French general of his age, and subsequently the first and best War Minister of Louis XVI., crossed the Trave (9—12 July) and advanced into Mecklenburg in search of the Russians. Saldern, with an eye to the benefit of his Holstein fatherland, had already secretly advised the Danish Government, that, in case of war, the Danes should at once assume the offensive so as to begin the struggle with the Russians *outside their own territories*, and as, moreover, St. Germaine knew, from personal observation, that the best defensive positions were to be found in Mecklenburg, he had determined to open the campaign there. The Danes took up a position south of Wismar on favourable ground, and an immediate engagement now seemed inevitable, inasmuch as the Russians were known to be advancing by forced marches. What then must have been

[1] Holm.

the amazement of St. Germaine when his scouts, a few hours later, brought him word that the Russians had actually begun to *retreat*. The riddle was solved a few days later when a message reached the Danish Commander-in-Chief to the effect that a Revolution had taken place at St. Petersburg and Peter III. was a prisoner in the hands of his own consort, who had already been proclaimed Autocrat of all the Russias.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONSPIRATORS

Impotence and isolation of Catherine—She attempts at first to humour her consort—Peter's generosity to her—His liaison with Elizabeth Vorontsova—Catherine's indifference—Peter's rudeness to Catherine in public—Extraordinary popularity of Catherine—Correctness of her public conduct—She becomes the centre of a conspiracy—Her fellow-conspirators—Nikita Panin—His character and ability—Prince Volkonsky—Cyril Razumovsky—Ekaterina Dashkova—Her character and share in the conspiracy—Catherine's ingratitude towards her—The Orlov Brothers—Catherine's liaison with Gregory Orlov.

As already indicated, the position of the Empress-Consort during her husband's reign, had been one of complete impotence and utter isolation. It may have been bad manners on their part, but the Foreign Ministers at St. Petersburg soon found out that it was good policy to ignore her. "Hitherto it does not appear that the Empress is much consulted," wrote Keith to Bute,[1] little more than a month after Peter's accession, "and those who have the best eye and have had the best opportunity of seeing the interior of this Court, think it not the likeliest way of succeeding to make any direct or particular address to her Imperial Majesty."

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30,999, f. 11.

Catherine was, at first, so depressed by her sense of helplessness that she swallowed her pride and made a determined effort to recover some credit by humouring her detested husband so far as actually to sit out one of his boisterous smoking parties till 2 o'clock in the morning. Peter, to whom this condescension on his consort's part was beyond all measure agreeable,[1] formally thanked her next day for her obliging courtesy, and if only Catherine had had the courage to persevere in this policy of complaisance, she might thoroughly have won her husband's heart. But the effort was beyond her power. Naturally impatient and imperious, her haughty and choleric temperament rarely could resist the first movement of rising wrath, and she would nullify in a moment the good effect of days of self-repression by discharging at Peter one of those pungent witticisms of which she always had an inexhaustible store. As, moreover, the Emperor's manifold absurdities gave her only too many opportunities of indulging her talent for sarcasm, their relations soon became strained again, till, at last, neither of the consorts took the trouble to conceal his or her aversion to the other. In justice to Peter it must be admitted that, despite bitter and frequent provocation, he never failed to treat his consort fairly and even graciously. The stories of his meanness and brutality, subsequently circulated by Catherine and her accomplices, are either simple calumnies, or gross exaggerations. Even Mercy, who detested Peter, grudgingly admits that he treated his consort with becoming respect as a rule. He was, indeed, too kind-hearted and

[1] Mercy, *Despatches.*

inconsequent to pursue, or even premeditate, any course of ill-treatment. No doubt he permitted himself outbursts of rage when stung beyond endurance by Catherine's scorn and contempt, yet in his own private circle he frequently admitted that he was "an honest blockhead" as compared with the Empress; and then too, his outbursts of wrath were few and far between, whereas his kindness was constant. A few days after his accession, on his own initiative,[1] he paid off all the debts that Catherine had contracted while Grand-Duchess, which were very considerable, without enquiring what they were for. Had he shown less magnanimity on this occasion and taken the trouble to examine his wife's accounts, he might have come upon some very compromising items. On her birthday in April he made her a present of domains worth £10,000, though he had already readjusted her whole establishment on a truly imperial scale and, in order to save appearances as much as possible, he contrived that she should pay him a friendly visit in his cabinet for an hour every day, a practice continued, unless interrupted by ill-health, till the very day of his dethronement.

A great deal used to be made of Peter's infidelity to his consort, which has often been described as a cruel insult from which she suffered most keenly. With all the facts now before me, I cannot but smile at such a preposterous view of the case. I am very far from insinuating that Peter III. was a model husband, and his curious connexion with the Countess Elizabeth Vorontsova was certainly as discreditable as it was ridiculous. I am strongly inclined

[1] Helbig, *Biographie Peters des Dritten.*

to think, however, that the only person who really suffered from his *liaison* was the unfortunate Emperor himself. The Court and the foreign ministers regarded the mistress of the Tsar's choice with amused wonder. No man with the slightest pretension to taste could have regarded such a creature with anything but disgust. The French Minister Breteuil describes her as having the manners and the appearance of a second-rate pot-house wench, whilst Bolotov was nauseated at the very sight of her broad, puffy, pock-marked face and her fat, squat, shapeless figure. She had, it appears, a pert, lively way with her which charmed Peter and, strange as it may seem, she certainly loved him for his own sake and not for what she could get out of him;[1] but, though tender and true-hearted, she was a very vixen in temper, and in her frequent moments of irritation rated her Imperial lover in language which would have been worse than death to any man with the least regard for his manhood. At the very beginning of his reign Peter elevated her to the rank of *Kammerfräulein* so as to give her precedence over all the other court ladies, and when he moved into the new Winter Palace "the Fräulein," as she was generally called, had her own suite of apartments immediately below those of the Emperor, while Catherine occupied the wing[2] overlooking the Neva and the Admiralty. So far

[1] At any rate she was not mercenary. A few diamonds, a poor little estate and a town house which was afterwards taken away from her, was all she ever got. The least exacting of Catherine's numerous paramours would have regarded himself as a fool if he had not grabbed at least a hundred times as much as poor Vorontsova was contented with.

[2] Helbig, *Biographie Peters des Dritten.*

from being scandalized by this juxtaposition, Catherine accepted it as a matter of course, indeed the two women lived on the best of terms and frequently proceeded together to receptions at the palace to pay their respects to their common lord.[1] Catherine knew she had nothing to fear from the influence of a lady so stupid and so ugly as Vorontsova, and was quite content that Peter should make himself happy in his own way provided that her own simultaneous *liaison* with the handsome young guardsman, Gregory Orlov, was undisturbed.

Nor was Peter's behaviour to his consort in public of the outrageous character we have been accustomed to suppose. The panegyrists of Catherine shock us with tales of numerous violent scenes, unprovoked menaces, threats of banishment and life-long incarceration, brutal insults and other horrors. As a matter of fact, there is only one single well-authenticated instance of an exhibition of temper on Peter's part against his consort in public, and even this has been distorted out of all recognition. On Feb. 21 at Peter's birthday banquet,[2] Mercy tells us, the Emperor proposed among other toasts, the health of the Imperial Family, which was drunk with boisterous enthusiasm. Immediately afterwards, Peter sent his favourite adjutant, Gudovich, who was standing as usual behind his master's chair, to ask the Empress why she had not risen to her feet when she drank the toast? Catherine, mounting at once upon her high horse, sent back word that as the Imperial Family

[1] Bolotov, *Zapiski.*

[2] *Not* on the occasion of the celebration of the feast with Prussia 4 months later, as Dashkova relates.

consisted only of her husband, her son and herself, she did not conceive that his Majesty could have thought her rising necessary. Gudovich presently came back to tell her from the Emperor that she was a fool and ought to have known that the Emperor's two uncles, Prince George of Holstein and the Prince of Holstein-Berk, were also of the Imperial Family, and lest his messenger should be tempted to soften the message he bawled the word "*dura!*"[1] at her in his shrill falsetto across the table, so as to be distinctly audible by the greater part of the company present. Catherine thereupon burst into tears, but attempted to recover herself by requesting Count Stroganov, the Court chamberlain and favourite court buffoon,[2] to hide her embarrassment by relating some little pleasantry—and so the incident terminated. Such conduct on Peter's part was, of course, scandalous and absolutely inexcusable. The bare possibility of such an insult sufficiently shewed how low Catherine must have sunk in the estimation of her consort. He, so manifestly her inferior, now openly treated her with contempt! Her impotence was patent to all the world, and in the consciousness that such was the case lay the real sting of the affront, which in itself was trumpery enough. Henceforth Catherine must have felt that there could be no accommodation between herself and Peter. Moreover, Peter was becoming more and more impossible every day, and already clearly foreseeing the inevitable catastrophe, the acute Princess resolved to turn it to her own advantage.

[1] Fool.

[2] He was also so fantastically ugly as to merit the nickname bestowed upon him of "baboon Stroganov."

She was indeed, the natural, the only possible leader of any revolt against the existing order of things. All eyes inevitably turned to her. Her well-known antagonism to Peter; her unique position as the mother and guardian of the future Sovereign; her many brilliant and engaging qualities; her courage, her patriotism, her enthusiasm for the honour and glory of her adopted country—everything pointed her out as the deliverer of the Russian Fatherland from the German yoke. At first much had been expected from her supposed influence over her consort, but it was now obvious to all the world that she had no influence over him whatever. She who should have been nearest to the Emperor was farthest from him. And yet, while he was detested, her popularity was manifest and universal. While Peter had been piling blunder upon blunder and alienating all classes of his subjects with a folly which a more superstitious age would have called judicial, Catherine had not made a single mistake, had not offended a single national prejudice. Her conduct, from the diplomatic point of view, had been absolutely correct. Whilst Peter III. had been shutting himself up in the society of his Holstein officers, Catherine had lost not a single opportunity of conciliating the Russian people. Whilst Peter had ostentatiously expressed his contempt for the Orthodox Church, ridiculing her ceremonies, violating her prescriptions and flouting her Ministers, Catherine, with scrupulous exactness, observed all the feasts and fasts of the Church and, fresh from the adulterous embraces of Gregory Orlov, prostrated herself for hours before the Altars of our Lady of Kazan to the general edification. While Peter knew no medium between unseemly

familiarity and revolting rudeness, Catherine overflowed with amiability, tenderness and sympathy, yet without the slightest disparagement to her dignity. Nevertheless, it is plain from the despatches of the French Ambassador, Breteuil, that at first, Catherine was profoundly discouraged at the general outlook. "The Empress," he writes, a week after Peter's accession, "is abandoned to grief and dark forebodings. Those who know her say she is scarce recognizable. She is growing thin and will soon be in her grave."[1] What discouraged her most of all was the rallying to the new Emperor of all the chief dignitaries and officials of the Empire, the very men who should have been *her* partisans and supporters. Three months later, however, Breteuil writes of Catherine in a very different tone. "The Empress," says he, "is putting a manly face upon it, she is as much loved and respected by everyone as the Emperor is hated and despised. . . It is impossible not to suspect (for I know her passionate audacity) that, sooner or later, she will venture on some desperate step."

And, in fact, by that time Catherine had actually begun to conspire. Her quick eye had detected the weak spot in her rival's defences—the very men who had placed Peter on the throne were now growing dissatisfied and uneasy. Peter was so capricious that they were uncertain of the continuance of his favour from day to day, especially as he was now the mere slave of the Prussians and the Prusiaks. With an alert wariness, a faultless sagacity and a profound knowledge of human nature, for which neither

[1] Herrmann: *Geschichte des Russischen Staats.*

her friends nor her foes gave her due credit, Catherine, calculating on the general discontent as her best ultimate ally, now proceeded to select and set in motion her confederates, cautiously keeping in the background herself till the time for a public demonstration should have arrived. The first person she addressed herself to was Count Panin, the Governor of the Grand-Duke Paul.

Nikita Ivanovich Panin, the future Grand-Chancellor of Russia and one of her most distinguished statesmen, was born at Dantzic on Sept. 18, 1718, and after serving for a time as a cornet in the Guards, exchanged the military for the civil service, and as Russian Ambassador at Stockholm, 1747—59, rendered his country important services by steadily opposing first the French and then the Prussian influence in Sweden. As the pupil and *protégé* (or as his enemies preferred to phrase it "the creature") of Chancellor Bestuzhev, whose political system he warmly adopted, he is said to have incurred the dislike of Bestuzhev's enemies the Vorontsovs and the Shuvalovs, and on the fall of his patron in 1758,[1] his position became precarious. It was very grievous to a man of his views and abilities to submit to the dictation of the Court of Versailles during the transitional period of the Seven Years' War, and he had the courage not only to protest against Russia's change of system, but to resign his post when his protests were not only disregarded but rebuked. On his return to St. Petersburg, the Empress Elizabeth, always a careful protector of native political talent, rewarded his services and at the same time shielded him from the

[1] Bain, *Daughter of Peter the Great,* Chap. VIII.

enmity of the powerful Vorontsov-Shuvalov clique, by appointing him Governor to the infant Grand-Duke Paul, a sheltered, unobtrusive, but at the same time very important post, where he exercised a great deal of private influence and had the ear of the Empress at all times. It is said that just before Elizabeth's death, Ivan Shuvalov suggested to Panin that he should suggest to the expiring Empress the advisability of superseding Peter by his son the Grand-Duke Paul, of whom Elizabeth was passionately fond, with Catherine as Regent, but Catherine's ambition scouted a scheme which would have subordinated her to her own child and so the project came to nothing. The person of the new Emperor was absolutely odious to Panin. Quite apart from politics indeed, what sympathy could there be between a feather-brained, flighty, garrulous Prince who affected the language and the manners of the barracks and the taproom, and an elegant, highly educated, valetudinarian statesman studious of ease, naturally reserved and of fastidious tastes, who had spent half his life at courts, and who, in his carefully powdered, big, full wig and elaborate, gold-brocaded costume, was the living image of Louis Quatorze stateliness? But Panin's grievances against Peter III. were not altogether of the sentimental order. There had been some talk of sending him back to Sweden to work there in the interests of the King of Prussia, contrary to his political convictions, in which case he would, of course, have lost his post of Governor to the Grand-Duke Paul. Personal preferences and community of interests and sympathies bound Panin to Catherine, and he was, undoubtedly, her chief counsellor on the eve of the crisis. His favourite plan, indeed, was the elevation of the rightful heir, the

Grand-Duke Paul, with Catherine as Regent, but he quickly abandoned the idea on finding it distasteful to the Empress. Nature, indeed, had never intended this cautious, fastidious diplomatist to be the protagonist of a Revolution. His time was to come when the *coup* had succeeded and order had to be evolved from the resulting chaos. [1]

But Nikita Panin was only one of many instruments. Catherine was already sure of most of her fellow-conspirators, and to each of them their part had already been allotted. Even in the Emperor's immediate *entourage* there were several persons ready to rally to her the moment victory inclined to her side. Field Marshal Villebois, master of the ordnance, General Glyebov, Prince Michael Nikitich Volkonsky, a kinsman of Bestuzhev's, and the Director-General of Police, Baron Nikolai Von Korff, had already for some time been in communication with her. All of these men (except perhaps Glyebov) were no doubt actuated by patriotism, while Glyebov, who had received more than anyone else from Peter and still stood high in his favour, had by this time convinced himself that the Emperor's absurdities were bound to end in a catastrophe and it was therefore becoming a case of *sauve qui peut.* Another dignitary whom Catherine was particularly anxious to win, but of whom she long entertained doubts was the Grand-Hetman, Count Cyril Razumovsky. That lazy voluptuary had clung tenaciously to his innumerable offices and dignities, and submitted to unheard-of indignities in order to retain the imperial favour. In this he had succeeded, but at the cost of becoming Peter's butt and stalking-

[1] Panin was much against any effusion of blood.

horse. His absurd figure looked absurder still in the new, tightly-fitting Prussian uniforms, and his clumsiness on the parade-ground afforded the alert and nimble Emperor exquisite amusement. The Grand-Hetman felt very uncomfortable, but for a season he endured everything, though occasionally he could not refrain from avenging himself by a mordant witticism. Thus, on one occasion, when Peter boasted before Razumovsky that Frederick the Great had made him a full general in the Prussian service, "Your Majesty can have your revenge," sneered Cyril, "by making him a Field Marshal in the Russian service." Nevertheless, Razumovsky's cowardice prevented him from breaking with Peter openly. For a long time he kept at arm's length Catherine's emissaries who came to him surreptitiously, generally at midnight, and was only persuaded at the last moment to join the conspiracy by his confidential adviser, one Teplov, a corrupt, immoral, but bold and very capable adventurer, who had been imprisoned by the Emperor for a gross offence and had consequently conceived a frantic hatred of Peter III. which he was shortly to be enabled to gratify.

The accession of these magnates was highly agreeable to Catherine, but she felt that nothing definite could be attempted without the assistance of the Guards. The Guards were known to be discontented at the preference shown to the Holsteiners by the Emperor, but it was necessary to manipulate this discontent and direct it into the proper channel, so that it might be translated into action on the first favourable occasion. Catherine had already found two excellent tools for this important task, the first was her friend the Princess Dashkova, the second her paramour, Gregory Orlov, both of them very remarkable persons.

THE PRINCESS
EKATERINA ROMANOVNA DASHKOVA.

Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, the second daughter of Count Roman Vorontsov, and the younger sister of the Emperor's mistress, was born on March 17th, 1743. The Empress Elizabeth held her at the font, and the Grand Duke Peter was her godfather. She was educated with her cousin, the daughter of the Grand-Chancellor, Michael Vorontsov, who was more than a father to her, her own father, Count Roman, being, as she naively expresses it, "a man of pleasure who willingly transferred me to my uncle." Her uncle spared no pains or expense upon her education, and she grew up one of the most accomplished young Russian women of her day, with a perfect command of three languages besides her own. An enthusiastic student, and an omnivorous reader, she devoted all her pocket-money to the purchase of a little library, which gradually grew into nine hundred volumes, including the works of Bayle, Montesquieu, Boileau, Voltaire and the Encyclopedia. When only fifteen, she was introduced to the Grand-Duchess, as a young person who devoted almost her whole time to study. This community of tastes speedily drew the two women together, and the empire of the elder Catherine, over the younger, fourteen years her junior, was instantaneous and complete. The Grand-Duchesss recognised at once what a useful instrument this clever, enthusiastic, high-spirited girl might he made, and Ekaterina Vorontsova repaid the esteem of the Grand-Duchess with a boundless devotion. Even her marriage, shortly afterwards, with Prince Michael Ivanovich Dashkov, was an event of quite secondary importance in her eyes. Dashkova is sometimes described by the foreign ministers at the Russian Court as a professional *intriguante* avid of

distinction, and sometimes as a revolutionary enthusiast animated by an energy worthy of a better cause. She was certainly ambitious and self-assertive, with an exaggerated opinion of her own importance. Yet a vein of genuine simplicity ran through her essentially romantic nature, which made her the easy dupe of a stronger spirit. There is something quite pathetic in her unwavering confidence in Catherine, in her unquestioning belief in the nobility of her friend's disposition, and our admiration of the skill with which the future Empress played upon the girl's affections is largely tempered with disgust at the ingratitude with which she repudiated her tool when done with. As a worshipper of Catherine, Dashkova naturally detested Catherine's boor of a husband. Yet, curiously enough, foolish Peter had a far truer estimate of his wife's character than the brilliant and impulsive Princess, as the following anecdote shows. "My child," Peter said to her one day (he always treated her as a spoilt child), "you would do well to recollect that it is much safer to deal with honest blockheads, like your sister and myself, than with great geniuses who squeeze the juice out of the orange, and then throw away the rind!" The course of events was speedily to show that Peter, for once, was right. As the judicious Solovev well observes, the famous Empress, under the influence of irritation and prejudice, frequently allowed herself to be absolutely reticent as to the past services, however important, of those whom she subsequently learnt to dislike.[1] At present, however, Dashkova,

[1] *After* the Revolution Catherine did all in her power to disparage Dashkova for fear lest the chief glory of it should be attributed to her. Thus we read as follows in her Memoirs:

still un-disillusioned, was full of ardour for the good cause. Her husband, who was in the Guards, had been sent on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople, to be out of harm's way, while she undertook to win over his comrades, young officers like Captains Passek and Bredekhin in the Preobrazhensky, and the Roslavevs in the Ismailovsky regiment, all of whom were known to be desirous of a change. She was

"The Princess Dashkova, youngest sister of Elizabeth Vorontsova, wished to appropriate to herself a share in this revolution, but to say nothing of her family [a covert sneer at the fact that her sister was the Emperor's mistress], her eighteen years was a sufficient reason not to repose any confidence in her. She says everything was done by me through her, but I had been in communication with the chiefs of the undertaking six months before she knew anything about it. It is true she was very *uma* (clever), but her mother wit was ruined by her marvellous conceit and her quarrelsome disposition [*i. e.* her refusal to approve of the adulterous connexion with Orlov]. The chiefs of the undertaking hated her, but she was friendly enough with the smaller fry, who told her what they knew—mere bagatelles."—This was written after the event, I say, when the innocent and unsuspecting Dashkova had just discovered her friend's intrigue with Orlov, and had expressed her indignation thereat in unmeasured terms. Yet, among the rewards distributed among those who had participated in the affair of July 9, we find a pension of no less than 12,000 rubles assigned to Dashkova, while the Grand-Hetman Razumovsky, Prince Volkonsky, and Count Panin, only received 5,000 each. Nay, there is a MS. note of Catherine's still extant, dated Aug. $\frac{5}{17}$, as follows: "Given to the Princess Ekaterina Dashkova, for her distinguished services to me and the fatherland, 24,000 rubles"!! No doubt, as will subsequently be seen, Dashkova unconsciously exaggerated the part she played in the *Coup d'Etat*, yet Catherine, who always liked to have value for her money, was not the woman to give a pension of 12,000 and a gratuity of 24,000 rubles to a rank outsider.

also acquainted with another officer, Loverusky by name, who was supposed to have some influence with the Grand-Hetman, Count Cyril Razumovsky, the Colonel of the Ismailovsky division of the Guards who was very popular with his comrades because he gave the best dinners in the Capital, and entertained all the world at his overflowing table.[1] All these young men were talked over by Dashkova who, during the week preceding the catastrophe, displayed an astonishing activity, scarce allowing herself time to eat or sleep. Yet, after all, it would be a great mistake to suppose, with Mr. Keith, that "she bore a principal part in contriving and carrying on the conspiracy from beginning to end." As a matter of fact, Dashkova was permitted to take only quite a subordinate part in the affair. Endued with a vivid imagination, and naturally disposed to magnify her own exploits, she had little difficulty, after the event, in persuading first herself, and then her acquaintances, that she was a prime mover in the whole conspiracy, but to anyone who carefully peruses that most misleading of delightful books, her Memoirs, it is quite clear, not only that her own *rôle* was not a very great one, but that she was quite ignorant of the fact that Catherine was simultaneously employing other intermediaries far more active and important than herself. Nay, more, she was absolutely unaware of the Empress's intimate and long-standing *liaison* with Gregory Orlov, who was labouring for his Imperial Mistress in the army more zealously and effectually than all the other conspirators put together.

Gregory Gregorevich Orlov, the second son of Gregory Ivanovich Orlov, Governor of Novgorod, was born in 1734, educated in the corps of cadets, served with distinction in

GREGOIRE GREGORIEWITZ
ORLOFF,
Begunstigde van Catharina II.

the Seven Years' War, and, on recovering from a wound received at the Battle of Zorndorff, was invalided to the Capital where he was transferred to the Artillery. He is described, in these early days, by a comrade, as an amiable, agreeable, open-handed young fellow, fond of pleasure, especially when there was a spice of danger in it, and one of the best dancers in the army. Catherine's attention was first drawn to him by the story of his audacious intrigue with the Princess Kurakina, the mistress of his benefactor, Count Peter Shuvalov, and when compelled by the Empress Elizabeth, for political reasons, to abandon her earlier lover, the handsome profligate Pole, Poniatowsky, Catherine easily consoled herself in the society of Gregory Orlov, who was procured for her by her usual intermediary in such affairs, her Kammerfrau Catherine Cherekovskaya. Through her influence he obtained from General Villebois the charge of the artillery military chest, and thus had a considerable sum of money at his disposal. He had long enjoyed a reputation for superior enterprise and daring among his brother officers, and he entered with characteristic ardour into the project of a rebellion whose object was at once to rescue a beloved Empress from oppression and deliver Russia from disgrace and dishonour. His first act was to win over to the good cause his four brothers, Ivan, Alexius, Theodore and Vladimir, all of them able energetic young officers like himself. His brother Alexius, in particular, was very highly gifted, and, as the victor of Chesmé a few years later, was to cover the Russian navy with glory. Another conspirator was the Piedmontese adventurer, Odart, who had come to Russia at the beginning of the reign of Peter with a letter

of introduction to the Chancellor Vorontsov, and ultimately obtained, through Dashkova, the post of Superintendent of the Emperor's domains. He was employed on the eve of the Revolution to obtain from the English merchant, Felton, a loan of 100,000 rubles for Catherine, who had great need of money, and had failed to obtain any from the French Ambassador, Breteuil, and the French Chargé d'Affaires, Beranger. As Odart received only 1000 rubles after the Revolution, his services in any case must have been slight.[1] But it was the five Orlovs who held in their hands the clue of the whole conspiracy, and were the nucleus round which the army gradually gathered. Working secretly but incessantly, they had, by the end of June, won over about forty officers and some ten thousand of the rank and file. The conspirators were divided into four groups, whose leaders held consultations at regular intervals, and so absolute was their mutual confidence, so perfect their organization, that there was not a single traitor to be found among them. Catherine, in her correspondence with her old lover, Poniatowsky, in Poland, mentions two young officers who particularly distinguished themselves by their sagacity and energy, Khitrovo of the Horse Guards, who subsequently was to raise the first rebellion against her, and a non-commissioned officer of seventeen, Potemkin by name, who was to supersede Orlov in her affections, just as Orlov had superseded Poniatowsky.

[1] In a midnight interview with Beranger in a lonely part of St. Petersburg, Odart, two days before the Revolution, described the prospects of the Empress as well-nigh desperate. He also said that two unsuccessful attempts had been made to seize Peter before his departure from the Capital. Bilbasov, vol. II. 8—9.

CHAPTER X

THE CATASTROPHE

Preparations for the Danish War—Warnings of Frederick II.—Peter's last public banquet—Arrest of Passek—Peter warned of his danger—Alarm of the conspirators—Orlov fetches Catherine from Peterhof to the Capital—Catherine at the barracks of the Guards—Proclaimed in the Kazan Cathedral Receives the homage of the Senate and Synod at the Winter Palace—Her first measures—Marches against Peterhof at the head of her Army—Peter III. at Oranienbaum—His absolute ignorance of the Revolution—His consternation at the discovery of Catherine's flight—Mission of the Grand-Chancellor to the Capital—Neelov's mission to Cronstadt—Devier and Taluizin at Cronstadt—Peter's expedition to Cronstadt—The fortress refuses him admittance—His flight to Oranienbaum—Dismisses his servants—His first letter to the Empress offering a compromise—Her contemptuous silence—Peter's second letter.—He abdicates the throne.

The time fixed for the outbreak was the departure of the Emperor for the front.[1] The Guards, accustomed as they had been for years to an idle and luxurious existence in the capital, were ready to risk anything rather than

[1] At first it was proposed to seize Peter in his private room at the Winter Palace, as was done with the Princess Anne and her four children by the Empress Elizabeth twenty years before, but this project was abandoned as too hazardous Arkhiv. Vor. xxv., 415.

encounter the hardships of a campaign of uncertain duration in distant Mecklenburg.

Meanwhile Peter, not altogether unaware, but utterly contemptuous, of the impending danger, was completing the preparations for his Danish campaign. Despite the anxious, urgent, representations of the King of Prussia, he had resolved to postpone his coronation till his return to Russia,[1] but he so far followed the advice of his mentor as to determine to take along with him all the Foreign Ambassadors resident at his Court, as well as all the principal Russian functionaries, so as to diminish the chance of a palace revolution during his absence. Frederick also urged the formation of a permanent camp near the Capital to overawe the malcontents, and protested, through Goltz, against the folly of leaving Prince George of Holstein at the head of affairs during Peter's absence. "I do not doubt the perfect devotion of his Serene Highness," he wrote, "but I do not consider him a sufficient genius to steer such an important barque, or take a sufficiently bold part if circumstances demand it." Peter himself had not the highest opinion of his cousin's head, and, with his usual frankness, had often told him so, but Prince George was to be assisted by a council of nine dignitaries,[2] including Field Marshals Trubetskoi and Münnich, and all the troops left behind were to be placed at his absolute disposal. On June 7th all the members of the Emperor's retinue were bidden to hold themselves ready to

[1] According to Mercy, Peter said that if the King of Prussia had refused to submit to so superfluous a ceremony, he, Peter, might well postpone it.

[2] Mercy, *Despatches.*

start within ten days, and the Russian squadron at Cronstadt was already under orders to sail at a moment's notice. On the 22nd, on the occasion of the festivities to celebrate the peace with Prussia, Peter's last bestowal of honours took place. Red and blue ribbons were freely distributed among the Emperor's adherents, including Biren's two sons; Dmitry Golitsuin's appointment as Vice-Chancellor was confirmed, and Alexander Shuvalov and Cyril Razumovsky were made Colonels of the Semenevsky and Ismailovsky Guards respectively, dignities hitherto reserved for the Russian Monarchs alone. A grand supper on the 21st, when five hundred guests sat down at the Imperial Table, and a second equally magnificent banquet on the 22nd, completed the festivities which lasted three days, during which time every house in the city was illuminated, and all the nobility appeared at Court in gala dress.[1] On June 23rd, Peter set out for his favourite country château of Oranienbaum to superintend the shipping of 8000 Holstein troops for the seat of war. A fortnight previously (June 6th) all the Ambassadors at St. Petersburg received a message to the effect that, if the exigencies of affairs should require his Majesty to put himself at the head of his armies in Germany, he would wish the[2] foreign ministers to follow his Court. Keith at once hastened obediently to pack up his trunks, but the same day Mercy announced his recall to Vienna, and Breteuil shortly afterwards, 25th June, departed for Paris.[3] The

[1] Mercy, *Despatches.*

[2] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30,999. June 6, 1762. Keith to Bute.

[3] Mercy, *Despatches.*—Not, as many French writers have erroneously supposed, because he foresaw and dreaded the coming

whole Court and all the business people, together with the two Chancellors, Vorontsov and Golitsuin, had already flitted to Oranienbaum, and were there to remain till after the approaching feast of St. Peter and St. Paul. Little business, however, was done. There was a continuous round of festivities, including, on June 30th, an opera, at which Peter played in the Court orchestra for the last time, coming over, for that express purpose, from the château of Peterhof, whither the Empress, having during the last five days completed her plans in the Capital, had repaired on the 29th, for St. Petersburg had now ceased to be the centre of political interest.[1] It was Peter's intention to celebrate his name day, which fell on July 9th, at Peterhof, and the Empress felt it safer to be there on that occasion. The war preparations were pushed on with feverish haste. Ten men-of-war, had already left Reval harbour, and six more with twelve frigates under Admiral Louis were lying in Cronstadt roads ready to depart. Peter, however, was at first inclined to await the issue of the Berlin Conference, when, on Tuesday, July 4th, the news reached him of the loan extorted by the Danes from Hamburg, and then nothing could keep him back any longer. The Preobrazhensky Guards immediately received orders to march off on Saturday the 7th at the latest, and the Semenovskis and the Ismailovskis were to follow suit. But now occurred an event which precipitated the catastrophe. One of the principal conspirators, Captain Passek of the Guards, was accosted,

coup d'état, but in obedience to orders from Choiseul, who would not allow him to pay the first visit to Prince George of Holstein.

[1] Mercy.

CATHERINE II.

Imperatrice de toutes les Russies.

on the evening of the 7th July, by a soldier who, with a terrified air, told him that the conspiracy had been discovered and the Empress was lost. Passek simply poohpoohed the idea, whereupon the soldier repeated the story to another officer, ignorant of the conspiracy, who not only promptly arrested him, but reported the matter to his superior officer, a Major Voeikov, who, after examining the soldier, thought it his duty to arrest Captain Passek also, and report the whole affair to the Emperor at Oranienbaum. Peter seems to have disregarded not only this, but several other warnings which reached him much about the same time. Thus, while still at Oranienbaum, he was informed by Colonel Baron Budberg,[1] that a conspiracy was afoot against him in which he, Budberg, had been invited to participate, but Peter, who considered that the Ministers of State and their wives, then staying with him at Oranienbaum, were sufficient hostages for the good behaviour of the capital, steadily ridiculed the idea that the Russians would ever prefer a woman to reign over them, and rejected every warning. Shortly afterwards[2] one of his friends handed him an account in writing of sundry suspicious circumstances at St. Petersburg. Peter, who chanced to be fiddling at the time, and always resented interruptions on such occasions, impatiently ordered his friend to leave the note on a little table close at hand, and then forgot all about it. On the very day on which Passek was arrested, Peter gave a great banquet, followed by a masquerade ball, in the Japanese

[1] Vasilchikov, *Semeistov Razumovskikh.* Vol. I.

[2] Bolotov, *Zapiski.*

Salon at Oranienbaum,[1] which the Empress also attended, coming over from Peterhof for that special purpose. The conspirators observed, with some alarm, that during the earlier part of the entertainment the Emperor was in a very bad humour, and had little of his usual vivacity. But he recovered his good spirits before the evening was over, and, on the following morning, accompanied the Empress to Gostalitsa,[2] the summer residence of Alexander Razumovsky who entertained them sumptuously. This was the last occasion on which the Emperor and Empress appeared in public together.

The tidings of the arrest of Passek and the fear of compromising revelations resulting therefrom, had profoundly agitated the conspirators, and forced them to take the final plunge. Gregory Orlov at once hastened to Panin, and asked him what had better be done. Panin enquired whether Passek had been arrested for a political offence or simply for a breach of military discipline, and, upon Orlov replying that he strongly suspected the former to be the case, Panin cautiously insinuated that no time was to be lost if anything could be accomplished. This counsel of their wisest head decided the conspirators to act at once. With the previous knowledge and consent of Panin, Cyril Razumovsky and Prince Volkonsky, it was arranged that Alexius Orlov should immediately proceed to Peterhof and bring Catherine back to the capital, while his four brothers circulated rumours in the capital that the Empress's life

[1] Vasilchikov, *Semeistov Razumovskikh.*

[2] Bilbasov, II., 21.

was in danger and prepared the Guards and the line regiments for her reception. The clergy seem already to have made sure of the people. At six o'clock in the morning of July 9, N.S., Catherine, who was sleeping in the Pavilion "Mon Plaisir" at Peterhof, was awakened by her kammerfräulein, Shevgovodskaya, and the next moment Alexius Orlov, who had just arrived from St. Petersburg with Vasily Bibikov after travelling all night, stole softly into her bedroom and whispered:[1] "The time has come, all is ready for your proclamation."—"What do you mean?" exclaimed Catherine, sitting up in bed. "Passek is arrested," replied Orlov. The Empress thereupon arose without another word, hastily put on her usual black dress, and accompanied Orlov downstairs and through the gardens to a back door looking out upon the road, where the carriage brought by Orlov and Bibikov awaited her.[2] Catherine got in followed by her maid and her lackey Shkurin, while Bibikov jumped up behind and Orlov sat on the box and took the reins, and they set off on their adventurous quest to the Capital forthwith. The horses, which had already gone more than thirty miles, soon grew tired, but, fortunately, when within five miles of St. Petersburg, they met another carriage sent to meet them, in which sat the favourite, Gregory Orlov, and young Prince Baryatinsky. Catherine was soon seated by her lover, and they all proceeded straight to the barracks of the Ismailovsky regiment of the Guards, which lay directly in

[1] Solovev, *Istoria Rossii.* Vol. XXV. Chap. 1.

[2] Solovev and Mercy. It is untrue that the conveyance used was a carriage provided weeks beforehand by the Princess Dashkova.

their way at the village of Kalenkina. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when the weary and travel-stained little band came in sight of the barracks. Gregory Orlov at once leaped out and ran forward, and the carriage, at a footpace, followed him into the courtyard. The soldiers came running out in twos and threes, pressed around Catherine and kissed her hands, feet, and the hem of her robe. The Empress thereupon protested to the soldiers, with tears in her eyes, that the lives of herself and her son were constantly endangered by the capricious tyranny of the Emperor, but that it was not so much for her own sake as for the sake of her beloved country and their holy orthodox religion, that she had been compelled to throw herself on their protection. The Guards responded with enthusiastic acclamations, and the chaplain of the regiment, Father Aleksyei Mikhailov, advancing cross in hand, administered the oath of allegiance, and, shortly afterwards, the popular Colonel of the regiment, Count Cyril Razumovsky, arrived, and, bending his knee before the Empress, respectfully kissed her hand. The Ismailovskis then escorted Catherine in her carriage towards the neighbouring village of Fontanka, where lay the barracks of the Semenovsky Regiment of the Guards, Razumovsky marching at their head with a drawn sword. But the Semenovskis, already aware of the good tidings, marched out of their own accord to meet Catherine, whose tears and protestations were rewarded by a fresh outburst of devotion, and both divisions of the Guards then conducted their "Mother" to the Kazan Cathedral, where, at about nine o'clock, she was solemnly proclaimed Sovereign-Autocrat, and her son, the Grand-Duke Paul, her successor, by the

Archbishop of Novgorod. Immediately after a short prayer had been said, the Empress, amidst the hurrahs of the mob and the joyful pealing of the bells, the priests leading the way with uplifted crosses, proceeded to the new Winter Palace, escorted by a countless multitude which thronged the principal thoroughfares, and repeatedly broke through her military escort. The third division of the Guards, however, the Preobrazhensky Regiment, still wavered. It was Peter's favourite regiment and contained a few of his partisans. Most of its officers, however, seem to have been lukewarmly loyal or coldly indifferent, but the majority of the soldiers were clearly on the side of the new Gosudaruinya, and, after a warm debate among themselves, they buckled on their swords, snatched up their muskets, tore to ribbons their tight-fitting Prussian uniforms, and, donning as many of their old green jackets as they could find, hastened off, more like a mob than a regiment, to the Winter Palace, which they found surrounded by their comrades of the Ismailovsky and Semenovsky Regiments whose pickets guarded all its entrances. Perceiving Catherine on the balcony, holding in her arms the little Grand-Duke Paul who had been brought to the Winter Palace a few moments before by his Governor, Count Panin, half awake and still in his night-dress, the Preobrazhenskis exclaimed: "Matyushka! forgive us for coming last of all! Our officers held us back! We wish the same thing as our brethren!" The Empress responded graciously to their salutations, and sent out an archpriest, who administered the oath of allegiance to the Preobrazhenskis there and then.

When Catherine reached the Winter Palace, she found the Senate and the Holy Synod already in session. It is

more than probable that Panin had seen to this, but, anyhow, the assembled hierarchy saluted Catherine as Empress, and Cyril Razumovsky's confidential agent, Teplov, who acted as Secretary to the Assembly, was instructed to draw up an Imperial Manifesto forthwith. This document was very short, but much to the point. In brief, it declared that Catherine, moved by the notorious perils threatening the Russian Fatherland and the Orthodox Religion, eager to rescue Russia from the bondage of an inglorious dependence on foreign Powers, and sustained by the Divine protection, had yielded to the clear and unmistakable wishes of her faithful subjects, that she should ascend the throne of all the Russias as Autocrat. The manifesto bears all the marks of extreme haste, but this was inevitable: there was still much to be done, and little time wherein to do it. It was not with the pen, but with the sword that the new Empress had to justify her deeds.

On leaving the Council Chamber, Catherine reviewed her forces, which already amounted to 14,000 men, in the great square facing the Palace. She was now sure of the capital and the Guards. Absolute silence prevailed everywhere except in those quarters of the city adjoining the Palace, indeed the only noticeable novelties were the pickets posted on the bridges, and some of the horse-guards patrolling through the streets to preserve public tranquillity.[1] And this surprising Revolution had been brought about in less than a couple of hours, with very few acts of violence[2] and no bloodshed.

[1] Keith, *Despatches.*

[2] Almost the only sufferer was Prince George of Holstein, who was seized by the soldiers before he could escape from the capital to warn Peter III., and somewhat roughly treated.

But the new Empress's work was still only half done till she had secured the arsenal of Cronstadt and the fleet. For greater convenience' sake, she migrated, in the course of the afternoon to the *Old* wooden Winter Palace along with the Senate and Secretary Teplov, and thence proceeded to distribute her orders. Admiral Taluizin was sent to Cronstadt with plenipotentiary powers to take over the charge of that fortress, and Vice-Admiral Polyansky, commanding the fleet, received an imperial rescript bidding him inform the Admiralty and the Navy of the accession of Catherine, administer the necessary oaths, and take no further measures till he received another ukaz. A special courier was at once despatched to the army-corps lying at Königsberg in East Prussia, addressed to General Peter Ivanovich Panin, Nikita Panin's brother, authorizing him to supersede Rumyantsev as Commander-in-Chief, and Rumyantsev, who was suspected of devotion to Peter III., was ordered to return to Russia instantly. Another courier was sent to General Chernuishev, ordering him also to bring back his army-corps to Russia forthwith. If the King of Prussia put any obstacle in his way, he was "to join the nearest army-corps of her Imperial Roman Majesty."

Catherine was already determined that Russian troops should no longer fight the battles of the King of Prussia, and more than that, she began to feel that she might have need of Chernuishev's army-corps herself. Ukazes and manifestoes on paper were all very well, but if Peter III. were to insist on his

Catherine, for his own safety's sake, detained him a prisoner, while her partisans wrecked his house from cellar to garret.

rights and fight for them, a civil war was inevitable, especially if the Emperor made his way to Rumyantsev's army, and, at the same time, called upon his friend the King of Prussia to support him by force of arms. Peter, therefore, must be forestalled at all hazards, so Catherine resolved to march against him, and proceed to Peterhof in person at the head of her forces. After confiding the fatherland, the nation and "my son" to the care of the Senate by a special ukaz, and partaking of a light meal, Catherine, attired in the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Guards,[1] and wearing a broad-brimmed hat (crowned with oak-leaves as symbols of strength) beneath which fluttered her beautiful long locks confined by a single ribbon, mounted a fiery dappled grey stallion, and at 10 o'clock on the evening of July 9th, set off for Peterhof. By her side rode the Grand-Hetman Razumovsky, Count Ivan Shuvalov, and the Princess Dashkova, also dressed in a Preobrazhensky uniform which she had borrowed from a young lieutenant of her own size and build, named Pushkin. The romantic young woman, by her own account, was overflowing with enthusiasm. Little did she anticipate the dark impending tragedy in which she herself was to be an involuntary and unconscious participator. Catherine commanded her troops in person, while Prince Volkonsky and Marshal Villebois acted as her chiefs of the staff.

On Friday June 28th (July 9th), at the very time when Catherine was being proclaimed Autocrat of all the Russias,

[1] According to *Raümer*, the different portions of her uniform had to be borrowed from various young officers on the spot.

Peter III. was engaged as usual, in drilling his Holsteiners on the parade-ground at Oranienbaum. After breakfast he ordered six large equipages to be got ready to convey him and his suite to Peterhof, on a visit of ceremony to the Empress, by way of beginning the festivities appointed for his name-day. There were with him, on this occasion, the Grand-Chancellor Vorontsov, his brother Count Roman, Field-Marshals Münnich and Alexander Shuvalov, the three Naruishkins, the Vice-Chancellor Prince A. M. Golitsuin, the Prussian Ambassador Von Goltz, Prince Trubetskoi, General Melgunov, General Ismailov, Prince Ivan Theod, Golitsuin, Gudovich, Secretary Volkov, Secretary Olsufiev, "the fat Fraulein," and the wives and daughters of all or most of the above-named dignitaries. The whole party started at about 10 o'clock, without the usual escort of hussars, the Emperor having forgotten to order it. Chatting pleasantly all the way, for Peter hated all ceremony, the merry company traversed the distance between Oranienbaum and Peterhof in less than the usual two hours, and, at about eleven o'clock, the equipages stopped before the gates of the Pavilion "Mon Plaisir," where Catherine, with her ladies, was supposed to be awaiting her consort, in order to offer him her congratulatious on his name-day. Imagine then the general consternation when the Château was found to be empty and deserted. The Empress had disappeared, and nobody could tell why she had fled, or whither! Peter, much perturbed, at once made his way through the grounds to the Pavilion, and explored all the rooms, turning out drawers and cupboards, peeping under beds and mattresses and other impossible hiding-places, screaming all the time

to the inseparable Gudovich: "Didn't I always tell you that she was capable of anything?" and demeaning himself generally like a madman. For half-an-hour or so, the utmost confusion prevailed, and nobody knew what to do. At last the Grand-Chancellor Vorontsov undertook to proceed to the Capital for definite information, and Prince Nikita Trubetskoi and Count Alexander Shuvalov, full of the remorse of mistaken time-servers who have pinned their fortunes to a losing cause, volunteered to accompany the Grand-Chancellor. Such experienced intriguers must, indeed, have already guessed the truth. Their Excellencies reached the Old Winter Palace just as Catherine was about to mount her charger. The honest but diffident Chancellor seems, on this occasion, to have made an unusual effort to do his duty. In a half-hearted way he began reproaching Catherine for taking up arms against her husband and Sovereign, but the Empress soon silenced the timid old man by taking him out on to the balcony of the palace, and, pointing to the huzzahing mob below them: "Deliver your message to them, Sir," she cried haughtily, "'tis they who command here. I do but obey." At this the resistance of the Chancellor entirely collapsed, and he suffered himself to be conducted to his town residence, where he remained under arrest till the return of the Empress. The same evening he addressed to his "Most Gracious Sovereign, whom the inscrutable decree of Providence has raised to the Imperial throne," a humble request to be relieved of all his offices and dignities, and permitted to pass the rest of his days in seclusion.[1]

[1] Yet according to Dashkova, he behaved with all the dignity of an ancient Roman Republican, declaring that he would never

Trubetskoi and Shuvalov gave even less trouble than Vorontsov. Before Catherine quitted the Capital, they had cheerfully sworn allegiance to her in the Kazan Cathedral.

Shortly after the departure of the three ministers, Peter received definite information of the revolution. He had proceeded at the head of his suite to the sea-side, to get "a sloop, a yacht and a galley ready in case of need," and there, moored close in shore, he found a longboat in which Lieutenant Bernhorst of the bombardier regiment of the Preobrazhensky Guards, had just brought some fireworks from St. Petersburg to Peterhof.[1] In answer to enquiries, Bernhorst declared that, on quitting the Capital at nine o'clock that morning, he had heard a great tumult and seen a great many soldiers running about with bared weapons saluting the Empress as Sovereign, but, giving the affair little attention, he had simply brought his fireworks to Peterhof as commanded. All uncertainty was now at an end. There could be no doubt of what had happened, and, in justice to Peter and his counsellors, it must be allowed that they now proceeded to take definite and energetic means for their own defence. As the result of a council, a number of adjutants and orderlies were despatched to all the cross-roads between St. Petersburg and Peterhof, to cut off all communications between the two places. Colonel Neelov was sent to Cronstadt to collect three thousand men from

betray the oath he had taken to the Emperor so long as Peter III. was alive. Dashkova, in fact, was much too grateful a niece to view the extremely ambiguous conduct of an uncle to whom she owed so much, in its proper light.

[1] Bilbasov, II., 41.

the garrison there, and send them in sloops and boats to Peterhof, and Adjutant Kostomarov and M. L. Ismailov were ordered off to St. Petersburg to bring from there the Astrakan and Ingrian regiments which were still supposed to be loyal.[1] Peter also sent an equerry to Oranienbaum, ordering the Holstein regiments stationed there to march to Peterhof at once, where, he said, he meant to defend himself to the death. A uniform of the Preobrazhensky Guards, with the order of St. Catherine attached to it, was also to be sent to him at the same time, that he might put it on instead of the Prussian uniform with the order of the Black Eagle, which he was actually wearing. Then he sent for Volkov and bade that skilful secretary dictate the necessary ukazes and manifestoes to half-a-dozen copyists, while he himself took some recreation by pacing the avenue running along the side of the canal in the lower gardens. Everyone who could wield a pen was sent for and set to work, so that scores of scribes were soon to be seen scattered about the grounds copying out ukazes at rustic tables, which were brought one by one to the Emperor for signature in the course of the afternoon. Not one of these documents, it may be mentioned, ever reached its destination, the hussars to whom they were entrusted, being captured by Catherine's scouts. Meanwhile Peter had no lack of advice. Unfortunately, all his counsellors counselled differently. Gallant old Münnich advised his master to proceed to St. Petersburg with a small suite of dignitaries, show himself to the people and the Guards, and exhort them to return to their

[1] Bilbasov, II., 42—3.

allegiance, at the same time promising to redress all grievances. On the other hand, Gudovich and Melgunov rejected this plan as too hazardous. It would, said they, endanger the person of the Sovereign. No doubt they were right, and Peter himself put an end to the controversy by agreeing with them. "I cannot do it," he cried. "I don't trust the Empress. She might let them insult me." Goltz then suggested going to Narva, where lay part of the army destined for the Danish war, and Peter sent orders to Larion Orshchin, the Director of Posts, to send fifty of the best horses forthwith to Peterhof for the purpose. Others again would have had Peter retire to his Holstein Duchy, and draw to him the army of Rumyantsev. Finally, it was resolved to send General Devier and Prince I. Baryatinsky to Cronstadt to reverse the orders given to Neelov, who, it will be remembered, had already been sent to the island fortress to bring back thence three thousand troops for the Emperor's protection. Devier and Baryatinsky were now instructed to hold the fortress for his Majesty.

Devier left Cronstadt at four o'clock, and reached his destination at six. Nothing had been known at Cronstadt of the revolution at St. Petersburg till Neelov's arrival, and he had very little to tell, but, at seven o'clock, Theodor Kadinkov, a naval secretary, arrived at Cronstadt with sealed orders for the Commandant, General Nummers, from his superior officer, Admiral Taluizin, at the Capital. According to these orders, Nummers was neither to admit anyone into Cronstadt nor allow anyone to depart therefrom. Nummers, much perplexed, but anxious to do his duty, concealed this order from Devier, but he could not conceal the fact

of the arrival of the naval secretary, and that gentleman, closely cross-examined by Devier and Baryatinsky, professed absolute ignorance of what was going on in the capital. The Emperor's envoys appear to have been satisfied at last with the state of things, for, at eight o'clock, Devier sent Baryatinsky back to Peterhof with a report for the Emperor, and an intimation that Cronstadt was at his Majesty's disposal. At nine o'clock, however, Admiral Taluizin himself appeared at Cronstadt with peremptory instructions from Catherine to take over the command of the fortress. Devier was forthwith arrested, and the whole garrison took the oath of allegiance to the new Empress with joyful alacrity.[1]

Meanwhile Prince Baryatinsky, with Devier's report in his pocket, reached Peterhof at 10 o'clock the same evening. He was the only one of the Emperor's numerous couriers who returned to him. He found that, during his six hours' absence, things at Peterhof had changed for the worse. The Emperor's suite was considerably diminished. His adjutants and orderlies had scattered in every direction. The Prussian Minister, Goltz, had departed for Oranienbaum. The rest of the company were either strolling languidly about the grounds, or sleeping on garden seats and benches. The Holstein troops, fresh from Oranienbaum, were encamped in the Zoological Gardens "to repel the first attack," but as they had no cartridges and very few cannon balls (a fact it was thought prudent to conceal from Peter's knowledge) they were evidently rather a decora-

[1] Bilbasov, II., 44—50.

tion than a defence. Peter himself, greatly agitated, was still pacing the alley bordering the canal. Devier's report, which the Emperor read aloud to the little band of anxious courtiers surrounding him, decided his course of action, especially as there were still no tidings of the fifty fleet horses which had been ordered from St. Petersburg earlier in the day to take him and his suite to Narva: to Cronstadt they must go, he said, for in Cronstadt there was still hope and safety.[1]

At the stroke of eleven the Emperor was conveyed in a sloop to a large galley lying off the roads, which had been made ready for the accommodation of himself, most of the ladies, Münnich and Gudovich, the rest of the party following in a yacht. As he took his seat in the sloop, Peter sent orders to the Holstein officers to take their troops back to Oranienbaum and "remain quiet there." The weather was fine, the wind favourable, and, at about one o'clock in the morning, the Peterhof flotilla reached Cronstadt harbour, which was found closed by a boom. The galley cast anchor thirty paces from the walls, a boat was let down, and Peter, Münnich, and two or three others, were rowed towards the fortress. But midshipman Mikhail Kozhukov, on duty on the bastion, bade the boat keep away or he would fire.[2] Peter, seeing in this threat the simple execution of his own command to Devier not to admit anyone into the fortress, thereupon stood up in the boat, and, throwing aside his mantle so as to display the broad blue ribbon of St. Andrew on his breast, exclaimed: "Don't you know me then? I am

[1] Bilbasov, II., 47—49.
[2] Bilbasov, II., 51—2.

your Gosudar!"—"We have no longer a Gosudar," was the reply. "Long live Catherine II.! She is now our Empress, and we have her orders to admit nobody within these walls. Another step forward, and we fire!" A panic fear thereupon overtook Peter, who hastened back to the galley more dead than alive. On re-embarking, he rushed into the stern cabin and fainted away in the arms of his faithful fat Fräulein. The galley then put off again, and Münnich, while awaiting his master's recovery, calmly paced the deck, reassuring the terrified ladies. It was clear by this time to the experienced veteran, himself the hero and the victim of three revolutions, that all was now lost. By four o'clock on the morning of July 10th the galley reached Oranienbaum, which was considered safer than Peterhof because the Holsteiners, who had been sent back from Peterhof, now lay there. The yacht, which had set sail on the first alarm, parted company with the galley and returned to Peterhof.

On disembarking, Peter gave everything up for lost. His one care now was to save his friends, for to the very last his characteristic goodnature asserted itself. Tearfully he bade the Prussian Minister Von Goltz go to St. Petersburg, as he, Peter, was no longer able to protect him. He then sent away as many of the ladies as his private carriages would hold (Elizabeth Vorontsova, however, refused to forsake him) and, after telling his Kammerdiener to dismiss all his domestics, as he no longer had any need of them, he fainted away on a sofa in the blue Atlas Cabinet, whose walls had been embellished in happier days by the hand of the very consort who was now his deadliest enemy. His first act on recovering consciousness was to send for pen, ink and paper, and write

an abject letter of apology to Catherine, in French,[1] offering to share his throne with her. This letter, despite the remonstrances of Münnich and Gudovich, who suggested that even a surrender at discretion would be preferable to such an abject self-abandonment, was entrusted to the Vice-Chancellor, Prince A. D. Golitsuin, who was charged to deliver it into Catherine's own hands. Golitsuin met Catherine at the Sergievsky Monastery, half-way on the road to Peterhof. He delivered his missive, to which the Empress did not even condescend to reply,[2] drily remarking to Golitsuin that the welfare of the State now required other measures. Thirty-six hours earlier such a letter might have been acceptable, but now it offered her only the half of a whole already in her possession. The Vice-Chancellor thereupon provided for his own future by taking the oath of allegiance to the Empress in the open air. He, at the same time, gave her the minutest details of the abortive Cronstadt expedition.

After waiting in vain for a reply, Peter hastily scribbled a second note in pencil,[3] and gave it to his adjutant, Major-General Ismailov, to take to Catherine, begging for his life and offering to abdicate and go to Holstein if Gudovich and Elizabeth Vorontsova might go with him. "I bring this message, Madam," said Ismailov, "because I know it to be sincere and voluntary, and because I hope thereby to save my country from the horrors of civil war."—"Very well," replied Catherine, "I accept the offer, but I must have the

[1] *See* Bilbasov, Vol. II., Catherine II.'s letter to the Senate, of June 29 (July 11), written the same afternoon from Peterhof.

[2] Subsequently she ironically described the letter as "very flattering." [3] Catherine's letter to the Senate.

abdication in writing." Ismailov thereupon drew up for Peter's signature, and in Peter's name, a form of abdication couched in the most abject terms. In this document the unhappy Emperor declared himself to be entirely responsible for the dilapidation of the realm during his reign, and utterly incapable of ruling. It concluded as follows: "And therefore, thinking the matter over dispassionately and unconstrainedly, I hereby solemnly declare, not only to the whole Russian Empire, but also to the whole world, that I for ever renounce the sovereignty of Russia . . . nor will I ever seek to recover the same at any time or by anybody's assistance, and I swear this before God." This act of abdication, surely the very quintessence of self-abasement, was forthwith taken to Oranienbaum for Peter's signature, by Ismailov, Golitsuin and Alexius Orlov. Ismailov found the Emperor sitting in his private cabinet, with his head in his hands, at a little oval table facing a portrait of his aunt the Empress Elizabeth, to whom he owed the crown he was now about to forfeit. "You see it is not so difficult, after all, to negotiate with the Empress," observed Ismailov jauntily as he entered the room (Golitsuin and Orlov remaining behind in the antechamber), "she wants to be friendly with you, and, if you will voluntarily resign the Imperial Crown, you may retire to Holstein unmolested." Yet, panic-stricken as he was, Peter hesitated for a moment to sign such a shameful surrender, only yielding when Ismailov, losing patience, threatened his former master with arrest and other penalties. The act of abdication, thus extorted, was at once conveyed to the Empress, who had now reached Peterhof, by Prince Golitsuin and Alexius Orlov.

CHAPTER XI

ROPSHA

Peter at Peterhof—Indignities inflicted on him—He is sent to Ropsha—His strict confinement there—Kindly treated at first—What is to be done with him?—Motives of the Empress and of the Orlovs for getting rid of him—His illness—And last days—Alexius Orlov's letter to Catherine—It's authenticity—Peter undoubtedly murdered—Proclamation that his death is due to natural causes—Exhibition of the body—Peter buried in the Church of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery.

At five o'clock in the morning of July 11th, a detachment of hussars, under Alexius Orlov, occupied Peterhof. The other regiments gradually arrived, one by one, and were drawn up round the courtyard. At eleven, the Empress, still in the uniform of an officer of the Guards, escorted by the Princess Dashkova, came galloping up amidst jubilant salvoes and ringing cheers. Between twelve and one, the Duke of Holstein, for to this petty dignity the ex-Emperor had now shrunk, was brought into Peterhof from Oranienbaum, by Alexius Orlov and Ismailov, in a crazy carriage unused for years and covered with dust both inside and out, his captors not deeming it worth while to clean it beforehand for a mere arrestant. Peter was accompanied by Elizabeth Vorontsova and the faithful Gudovich, who clung to him to the last. The carriage drove up to the entrance

the Château of Peterhof amidst profound silence, for Peter before starting had been warned by Ismailov not to speak a word on peril of his life, and the soldiers, through whose ranks he passed, did not even know who was in the carriage. Peter got out of his carriage in silence, and after taking leave of Gudovich and Vorontsova, both of whom were at once arrested by order of the Empress,[1] and surrendering his sword and blue ribbon to the officer on duty, mounted the staircase and was led into a room in the right wing of the Château which he had formerly occupied as Grand-Duke. Here he was divested of his Preobrazhensky uniform, and left standing in his shirt and stockings for some time till his janitors succeeded in discovering for him an old dressing-gown and a pair of slippers; all this time he never uttered a word, and presently swooned away, remaining unconscious for some hours. Later in the afternoon, the urbane and fatherly Panin was sent by Catherine to discover Peter's wishes and request him to choose a a place of residence till "decent and honourable apartments" could be prepared for him in the fortress of Schlüsselburg. Panin was profoundly touched by the pitiable condition of the ex-Emperor. Many years afterwards he told a friend that he always accounted it the greatest misfortune of his life to have been forced to see the Emperor at such a time.[2] Peter selected for his temporary residence Ropsha, a lonely but pleasantly situated country house, a few miles away, which had belonged to him while he was still Grand-Duke, and begged hard, but in vain, that his mistress, Elizabeth

[1] They were shortly afterwards released and pardoned.

[2] Bilbasov, II., 66.

Vorontsova, might be allowed to accompany him. This, however, was the only request he made. The often repeated story that he also pleaded for an interview with the Empress is absolutely untrue.[1] At five o'clock that afternoon, Peter departed for Ropsha in a large carriage and six, with the blinds drawn down, surrounded by soldiers of all arms, and followed by an escort of horse-guards under the command of Alexius Orlov, Captain Passek, Prince Theodor Baryatinsky, and Lieut. Barkakov. Four hours later, the triumphant Empress, extenuated by the anxieties and exertions of this eventful day, quitted Peterhof for the Capital.

At eight o'clock in the evening of June 27 (July 11), the "arrestant's" carriage stopped at Ropsha. The château dated from the days of Peter the Great, its architect, who presented it to his favourite, the cruel Prince Theodor Yurevich Romodanovsky, in whose family it remained till the Empress Elizabeth appropriated it, finally transferring it to her nephew the Grand-Duke. It was a fair-sized stone building surrounded by a well-kept park, in the midst of which was a large pond where Elizabeth Petrovna used often to fish. Although the Grand-Duke had always liked Ropsha, he had preferred to live at Oranienbaum, because there he had his complete toy fortress and his Holsteiners, whereas Ropsha had only a small and simple earthwork to show for itself. During his reign, moreover, Peter had never once set foot in the place.

The ex-Emperor was now lodged in the principal dormitory of the Ropsha Château, a good-sized room, in a corner of

[1] Bilbasov, II., 66.

which stood a bed in an alcove. The green blinds were kept closely drawn, so that the soldiers outside might not look into the room. Peter had the room all to himself, but a sentry stood on guard at the door, and grenadiers were posted all round the building, the arrestant not being permitted to walk in the Park, or even take the air on the terrace outside his room. On the following morning Peter complained to the officer on duty that he had passed a very bad night, and would never be able to sleep properly till he had his favourite bed from Oranienbaum: the same day the Oranienbaum bed, by special command, was sent to Ropsha.[1] The first day of Peter's imprisonment was Sunday, and, feeling very lonely, he requested that his fiddle, his poodle, his German doctor, Lüders, his Oberkammerdiener, Tunler, and his negro servant, Narcisse, should be sent to him. The Empress was no sooner made acquainted with his wishes, than she ordered General I. V. Suvorov to find all these persons and send them to Ropsha, with the poodle and the fiddle, as soon as possible, together with the Holsteiner, Lieut. Col. Kihl, to whom Peter was much attached.[2] At first Peter appears to have been treated not unkindly by Alexius Orlov, his principal custodian, who tried to amuse the ex-Emperor by playing at cards with

[1] Bilbasov II., 105.

[2] Catherine's letter to Suvorov quoted *in extenso* by Bilbasov II., 106. On the other hand, none of these people, except Lüders, ever came to Ropsha. Whether they were afraid to come or could not be found, or whether Catherine changed her mind, we do not know. Anyhow, Peter had to do without his fiddle, his poodle and his negro.

him and lending him ducats wherewith to pay his losses. But even Orlov could not exceed his instructions, so that whenever the "arrestant" asked for permission to take the air outside, his agreeable janitor could only open the door, point to the armed sentry who barred the way, and regretfully shrug his shoulders. [1]

Meanwhile, at St. Petersburg, the great question agitating Catherine and her counsellors was how to dispose of "the former Emperor." [2] The original plan of imprisoning Peter for life in the fortress of Schlüsselburg had now been abandoned. Schlüsselburg was too near the Capital, and a dethroned and imprisoned Emperor might easily awaken popular sympathy. Russians in general always sympathize with political prisoners, and the revolution had by no means satisfied everybody, as the Empress was already beginning to discover. An obvious alternative was to send Peter back to his Holstein Duchy. But even there he would always be something of a menace so long as the sinister and disquieting King of Prussia was at his elbow. But what then was to be done with him? There had been some hopes at first that the ex-Emperor would himself resolve the difficult problem by conveniently dying a natural death. Physically as well as mentally Peter had always been a crazy creature, and the terrible shock of the 10th July might well have shaken a much stronger man. On the Sunday

[1] *See* Schumacher, Secretary of the Danish Embassy, quoted by Bilbasov. Bilbasov was the first, five years ago, to call attention to the testimony of this very valuable witness, till then quite unknown.

[2] Catherine's usual designation for her dethroned husband.

after his arrest he had indeed complained of violent headaches, but his private physician, Dr. Lüders,[1] had sent him a prescription which gave him temporary relief, and he now seemed to be as well as he usually was. The whole situation was embarrassing, for the Empress and her counsellors seem to have made up their minds that the ex-Emperor must be got rid of or "made harmless" somehow. Catherine, at any rate, was determined to take no risks, and her friends were all aware of her sentiments. On the other hand, she was far too prudent and circumspect even to hint at the desirability of an unnatural death now that a natural death had become a very remote probability, nor can one imagine the most audacious of her athletic young admirers directly suggesting to her such a consummation, however devoutly to be wished. Yet we may be quite sure, from what we know both of her character and of theirs, that the Orlovs, at any rate, had already persuaded themselves that so long as appearances could be saved, and the Mistress for whom they were working was not admitted into their confidence beforehand, they might safely rid her of the one obstruction in her glorious path with very little fear of her subsequent resentment. Let the end be once attained and she would doubtless be comparatively indifferent as to the means. Moreover, the Orlovs had even stronger motives for suppressing Peter than Catherine herself. Gregory Orlov, the favourite, had already begun to cherish the ambitious dream of winning the hand as well as the heart of his

[1] Lüders at first refused to join the ex-Emperor at Ropsha, for fear of the consequences to himself.

imperial Mistress. If the Empress Elizabeth had privately married a Cossack shepherd-lad, what prevented the Empress Catherine from marrying, aye and marrying openly, a lover who, compared with Elizabeth's husband, was a man of birth and breeding, and a distinguished soldier to boot? Only one thing—the ex-Emperor stood in the way. Dethroned, disgraced, imprisoned, hid away though he might be, Peter was still in the eyes of every Russian the lawful husband of Catherine II. No ukaz, no manifesto, no revolution even, nought but death itself could sever a nuptial tie which had received the sanction and the benediction of the Orthodox Church. Nay, more, less than a week after the Revolution, the position of Gregory Orlov himself was by no means so radiant as it had been. The favours lavished upon him by the Empress on and after the 10th July, had opened many jealous eyes and scandalized many noble hearts. Even the enthusiastic Dashkova had been disillusioned and disgusted by Orlov's insolent familiarity with her imperial friend, who was no longer her ideal. A party, a strong party, was even in process of formation with the avowed object of overthrowing Gregory Orlov, and if Gregory fell, his four brethren must inevitably fall with him. But once let the ex-Emperor be removed and there would be nothing between Gregory Orlov and the throne, or, at the very least, the Empress would eternally be united to the Orlov family by the indissoluble ties of an immense obligation. Such seem to have been the motives which induced the Orlovs to imperil their souls, as they had imperilled their bodies, in Catherine's service. Anyhow, if they were to move in the matter at all, it was incumbent upon them to move quickly, and they were

never the men to hesitate when once their minds had been made up. The mysterious tragedy at Ropsha was undoubtedly the result of their excogitations.

On the evening of Wednesday, July 3/15, the fourth day after the symptoms of Peter's illness had first appeared, Dr. Lüders came out to see him from St. Petersburg. On Thursday, July 16th, the ex-Emperor was apparently worse; at any rate, we find on that day an additional doctor at Ropsha, Staff-Surgeon Paulsen, who had already been rewarded for certain slight services rendered during the Revolution. Shortly afterwards the two doctors pronounced the patient to be better.[1] On Friday all was quiet at Ropsha. On Saturday morning, July 18th, while the prisoner still slept, his kammerdiener, strolling out in the park "for a breath of fresh air," was suddenly seized by the command of the officer on duty, gagged, thrust into a close carriage and sent away.[2] The same day, at about six o'clock in the evening, a courier arrived at the Capital from Ropsha, conveying to Catherine a note from Orlov, written in Russian, on a sheet of dirty grey paper. The handwriting of this note was so shaky as to be almost illegible, while its contents could only have

[1] Apparently Peter's first illness lasted three whole days, July 12—15. On the 15th he was better, but almost immediately afterwards there seems to have been a relapse, lasting from the evening of the 16th to midday on the 18th. On the evening of the 18th he was *dead*. Catherine, writing *after* the event, says: "La peur lui avait donné un cours de ventre qui dura trois jours et qui passa le quatrième. La colique hémorroidale lui prit avec du transport au cerveau, il fut deux jours dans cet état." See Bilbasov II., 112—113.

[2] Schumacher, cited by Bilbasov, II., 113—114, note.

COUNT ALEXIUS GREGOREVICH ORLOV.

been written by a man bemused with drink, or frantic with horror. Literally translated, it runs as follows: "Matyushka,[1] most merciful Gosudaruinya,[2] how can I explain, [how can I] describe what has happened? Thou wilt not believe thy faithful servant, but so help me God I speak the truth, Matyushka. I am ready to go to death, but I myself know not how this mischief happened. We are ruined if thou dost not have mercy. Matyushka—he is no more. But nobody thinks it, and what were we thinking of to raise our hands against our Gosudar. But, Gosudaruinya, the mischief is done. He struggled behind the table with Prince Theodor [Baryatinsky], but we succeeded in separating them, and he is no more. I myself don't remember what we did, but the whole lot of us are guilty and worthy of punishment. Have mercy upon me, if only for my brother [Gregory]'s sake. I make my confession to thee and it is no good investigating. Forgive us or order an end to be made of us quickly. The world is unmerciful, we have angered thee and lost our souls for ever."[3]

[1] Little mother, or dear mother.

[2] Sovereign lady.

[3] The authenticity of this letter, which was first printed in 1881 (Arkh. Vor. XXI., 430), is indisputable. The original was destroyed by the Emperor Paul, but Theod. Rostopchin, in whose hands it remained for a quarter of an hour, took a copy of it beforehand. It happened thus. Three days after Catherine's death, the Emperor Paul commissioned the Grand-Duke Alexander, the Chancellor Count Bezborodko and Rostopchin to examine the sealed papers in Catherine's cabinet. The letter was found in a private cabinet of the Empress, where it had lain for 34 years, and Rostopchin, through whose hands it then passed, instantly recognised the handwriting as Alexius Orlov's. He also tells

This letter leaves it beyond doubt that Peter III. was brutally murdered in the afternoon of July 18th, 1762, by Alexius Orlov, Theodor Baryatinsky, and several other persons still unknown.[1] The tidings of the deed seem to have come upon Catherine as a surprise and a shock. She may even have shed tears as some say she did. Possibly she did not expect the inevitable catastrophe to happen so soon. Anyhow, she frankly accepted the accomplished fact, shielded the assassins as in duty bound (after all, their crime was a personal service to herself), and endeavoured, with some success, to hoodwink her own subjects and the world in general. We know that, to put it succinctly, "crime rather than cowardice"[2] was one of her favourite maxims. So while carefully preserving Orlov's letter in her private casket, that it might one day serve to exonerate her to some extent[3] in the eyes of posterity, she took good care to present her

us that the Emperor Paul, after reading the letter, threw it behind the fire, so as to destroy the sole existing piece of evidence implicating his mother as an accessory after the fact in the murder of his own father. Dashkova also mentions the letter in her Mémoires. See Bilbasov, II., 113—115.

[1] Helbig's (Biographie Peters des Dritten) lurid and most circumstantial account of the murder is pure fiction: Appendix II. The real manner of the deed, whether it was poisoning, suffocation or strangulation, or all three combined, will never be known. Even the names of the murderers are different in different accounts. Two Orlovs, but not Gregory Orlov the favourite, seem to have been directly implicated.

[2] "Il faut être ferme dans ses résolutions," she says, "il vaut mieux mal faire que de changer d'avis, il n'y a que les sots qui soient indécis." Bilbasov II., 116—117.

[3] It showed, at any rate, that the murder was committed without her previous knowledge or consent.

THE EMPRESS CATHERINE II.

conduct to her contemporaries in the fairest light possible. First of all, she affected to believe that some of the officers in charge of her husband, who were known to hate him personally, might have poisoned him, and she ordered a post-mortem examination to be made. "I had him opened," she explains, "but I have been assured that no trace of poison could be found."[1] A hypocritical, not to say blasphemous, proclamation, composed by the advice and with the assistance of Panin, was then issued, ascribing the ex-Emperor's death to a violent fit of colic.[2] The proclamation proceeded to declare that Her Imperial Majesty, regarding this unexpected death as a manifestation of the Divine Will, invites her faithful subjects to proceed to the Nevsky Monastery in order to pay the last honours to the whilom Emperor, and pray for the repose of his soul. It was also by the advice of Panin that the body of the murdered Prince was publicly exhibited. For it has ever been a failing of the Russian people tenaciously to believe in the resurrection of those of its Rulers who have died suddenly and mysteriously, as the numerous procession through Russian history of Samozvantsui, or Pretenders, sufficiently attests. No doubt Panin argued that it was safer, on the whole, to assure the people of the death of Peter by showing them his body, than to foster the belief that he was still alive by concealing it. Moreover, every means was taken to let the public see as little of the dead Gosudar as possible. The poor remains of the ex-Emperor, bruised and bleeding, black and swollen, were huddled into a blue and white

[1] See Appendix VII. [2] Keith.

Holstein uniform, with boots and gloves complete. A hat, a size too large, was drawn over his forehead and part of his face,[1] while an extraordinarily ample cravat was wound several times round his neck and throat. The corpse unembellished by a single decoration, was then placed in a side-chapel of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, on a bier a few feet in height, with two lighted candles at the head and two at the feet, and guards were stationed all round, to keep the long line of visitors continually on the move. Catherine herself, reluctantly yielding "to the loyal representations" of the Senate, expressed by Count Nikita Panin, abandoned, "for her health's sake," her original intention of attending the obsequies of her late husband, and, on July 23rd, the remains of Peter III. were deposited in one of the vaults of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, by the side of the body of another German Ruler of Russia, Anne Leopoldovna, to whose semi-imbecile son Peter, during his own short reign, had been singular in showing courtesy and kindness. Here they rested during the thirty-four years' reign of his consort and supplanter. It was reserved for the filial piety of his son, the Emperor Paul, to render due honour to the memory of his unhappy father, by causing his bones to be removed from their obscure resting-place, and conveyed,[2] with befitting pomp, to the Imperial Mausoleum at St. Petersburg, where they were reverentially laid by the side of the dead Catherine.

[1] It was noticed by many that his face was almost black, as if he had died of apoplexy.

[2] On this occasion two of the surviving murderers were compelled by the Emperor, to assist in carrying the coffin of their former victim to its last resting-place.

APPENDIXES

Contemporary and other narratives relating to the death of Peter III.

DOCUMENTS

I. Rulhière's Narrative.

II. Helbig's Narrative.

III. Hermann's Narrative.

IV. Castera's Narrative.

V. Dashkova's Narrative.

VI. Saldern's Narrative.

VII. Catherine's Narrative, contained in her letter to Poniatowsky of 2nd August, 1762.

VIII. Narrative of the French Chargé d'Affaires, Béranger, July 23rd, 1762.

APPENDIXES

I

RULHIÈRE'S NARRATIVE

"PETER, in putting himself into the power of his wife, was not entirely destitute of hope. The first troops which he met had never before seen him; they consisted of those three thousand Cossacks whom chance alone had brought to witness this event; they preserved a profound silence, and the emotion which he could not suppress at their appearance, did not excite in them the least uneasiness. But as soon as the army perceived him, its unanimous shouts of 'Long live Catherine!' began to resound on every side. It was in the midst of this new proclamation, continued with unremitting fury, that he passed through all the regiments. His head turned. On arriving at the grand staircase and alighting from the coach, his mistress was carried off by the soldiers, who tore off her ribbons. His favourite, presuming to answer the soldiers with a haughty air and to reproach them with the crime they were committing, was interrupted with loud bursts of laughter. The Emperor ascended alone, agitated with rage. They cried to him: 'Undress yourself,' and on one of these rebels putting forth his hand to assist him, he himself tore off his ribbons, his sword, his clothes, saying, 'Well then, I am at your disposal.' They permitted him to stand some minutes in his shirt, and barefooted, exposed to the derision of the soldiers. Thus was Peter for ever separated from his mistress and his favourite, and

shortly after they were all three carried away in different directions under strong escorts."

"Peter was confined in a pleasant villa, called Robschak [sic], six leagues distant from Petersburg. On the road he had requested to have some cards, of which he constructed a kind of fort, saying at the same time, 'I shall see no other while I live.' On his arrival at this country seat, he had made a request to have his violin, his dog and his negro."

"But the soldiers were astonished at what they had done, they could not imagine by what enchantment it was that they had been so far carried away, as to dethrone the grandson of Peter the Great, to place his crown on the head of a German woman. The greater part of them, without design and without any idea, had been hurried along by the movements of their companions; and each of them, shrinking back into his own littleness, after the pleasure of disposing of a crown had evaporated, retained no feeling but that of remorse. The sailors, who had not been in the least degree concerned in the insurrection, openly reproached the Guards in the public houses, with having sold their Emperor for beer. Pity which pleads the cause of the worst of criminals, made its voice to be heard in every heart. One night a troop of soldiers, attached to the Empress, assembled in a riotous manner, through a false alarm, exclaiming that their Mother was in danger. It was necessary to awake her that they might have a sight of her. The following night another tumult arose, still more alarming. So long as the life of the Emperor left a pretext for disquietude, it was believed that there would be no tranquillity."

"One of the Counts Orlov, for, from the first day, this title had been given them, whom some soldiers nicknamed *le Balafré* . . . and one named Teplov, who had risen from the meanest employments by a singular art of destroying his rivals, presented themselves before this unhappy Prince.

They announced to him on their entrance that they were come to dine with him, and, according to the custom in Russia, glasses of brandy were brought in before the repast. That which the Emperor drank was a glass of poison. Whether it was that they were in haste to carry the news of their own exploit, or whether the very horribility of the deed prompted them to hurry it to a conclusion, a moment after they poured out for him a second glass. Already his entrails were on fire, and the atrocity of their physiognomies exciting his suspicion, he refused this glass; they employed violence to force it down his throat, and he, in repelling them. In this dreadful struggle, in order to stifle his cries, which now began to be heard at a distance, they threw themselves upon him, seized him by the throat and threw him down; but as he defended himself with all the strength which the last despair communicated, and as they avoided giving him any wound, beginning to be afraid on their own account, they called to their assistance two officers who had the charge of his person, and who were that moment without at the gate of his prison. One of these was the youngest of the Princes Baryatinsky and the other was named Potemkin,[1] a youth of about seventeen. They had displayed so much zeal in the conspiracy, that notwithstanding their extreme youth, they had been entrusted with the command of this Guard. They ran in, and three of these murderers bound a napkin tight round the neck of the unfortunate Emperor, whilst Orlov, with his two knees, pressed upon his breast and stopped his breath, in this manner they strangled him and he remained lifeless in their hands."

"It is not known with any certainty what share the Empress had in accomplishing this event; but it is an undoubted fact that the same day on which it happened, as

[1] Potemkin was never at Ropsha.

the Princess was sitting down to dinner with a great deal of gaiety, that same Orlov entered with his hair all dishevelled, covered with sweat and dust, his clothes torn, his physiognomy agitated, and filled with horror and precipitation. On his entrance, his glaring and disturbed eyes sought those of the Empress. She arose in silence and went into a closet, whither he followed her, and, a few minutes afterwards, she ordered Count Panin to be called. . . . She informed him that the Emperor was dead and consulted him on the manner in which this death should be announced to the public. Panin advised her to let one night pass, and to publish the news of it next day, as if it had been received during the night. Having agreed to follow this advice, the Empress re-entered with the same countenance, and continued her dinner with the same gaiety. The next day, when it was reported that Peter was dead, in consequence of a hemorrhoidal colic, she appeared bathed in tears, and published her grief by an edict."[1]

II

HELBIG'S NARRATIVE

"Meanwhile the lawful Sovereign was pining in a prison. An officer of the guard and a sergeant, chosen from among those who had been the most devoted adherents of the Empress before and during the Revolution and were friends of the Orlovs remained at Ropsha the whole time. They were regularly relieved, and formed the whole society of the unhappy Prince. . . . He was consoled with vain promises from day to day. In order to have some sort of relaxation,

[1] "A History or Anecdotes of the Revolution in Russia in the year 1762. Translated from the French of M. de Rulhière," pp. 151—168. London, 1797. The English, it will be noted, is but indifferent.

he demanded a Bible, a violin, some romances, his negro servant, and a dog which he dearly loved. A circumstance which ought to have quite opened his eyes and prepared him for the fate that awaited him was this: his guardians had the revolting inhumanity to ridicule his wishes and reject them.

"... Criminal calumniators have dared directly to accuse the Empress of commanding the murder of her husband. All the reasons alleged for this opinion are inadequate. As deeply as this Catherine could not fall.

"... It was certainly not the Empress who caused her husband to be made away with. The murder once committed, however, prudence urged her to hide the fact from the world and even to reward the murderers.... On the other hand, she may justly be reproached for not exerting all her authority to guarantee the safety of her husband.... The Empress certainly omitted to give the necessary commands on this head, probably from sheer levity, or because she fancied that none would dare to make an attempt upon his life without her consent.

"The policy of the new rulers demanded the death of the dethroned Emperor. The Orlovs insisted upon it and were, in fact, the chief prompters of this murder. They had the example of Elizabeth and Count Razumovsky before their eyes. In order to consolidate their position they wanted Catherine to marry Gregory Orlov. But this were impossible so long as Peter lived, the Russian canon law not permitting divorce under any circumstances. The murder therefore was determined upon without scruple.... The circumstances of the ghastly deed are pretty much as follows.

"The violent emotions consequent upon his dethronement had made the Emperor ill. The Empress therefore, of her own initiative, had sent her skilful German surgeon, Lüders, to Ropsha, he was to remain there at the disposal of the invalid. As Peter was still young he had a good chance

of recovery, but this was by no means what his murderers wanted. They felt therefore that they must hasten, especially as his illness favoured their designs. Consequently, without the knowledge or command of the Empress, whose name they nevertheless misused in the affair, they induced another of her surgeons to poison some Burgundy, of which wine the Emperor was very fond. Provided with this doctored beverage, Alexius Orlov, on the morning of 17 July, N. S., rode out to Ropsha. Doubtless he believed that the poison would operate effectually, rapidly, and without exciting suspicion, and made up his mind to see the Emperor die so as to be quite sure of his affair. Circumstances compelled him, nevertheless, to play a different part. One cannot but marvel that this murderous tragedy was not played more privily. The number of the murderers, accessories and witnesses of the deed amounted to no fewer than nine persons. Alexius Orlov, was accompanied by his cousin Gregory, the youngest Prince Bariatinsky, Teplov, a famous actor called Volkhov, and an imperial cabinet-courier. . . . At Ropsha itself there were four other initiated persons, viz., the elder Prince Bariatinsky, Engelhardt, a sergeant of the Guard, and two Guardsmen whose assistance was called in later when the poisoned Burgundy failed to kill. When the murderers arrived, Peter, who was really unwell, was sitting at the table, half-dressed, drawing the plan of a fortress with a piece of chalk. He was glad to see Teplov, whom he knew, being unaware of the part he had played in the Revolution. Alexius Orlov followed close upon the heels of Teplov. They both said they brought him the joyful intelligence that he would now very soon be set at liberty, and that, in the meantime, they hoped that he would allow them and their comrades, the other Orlov and the younger Bariatinsky, to dine with him. The deceived Prince consented with great satisfaction. They sat down at table. He himself

called for Burgundy, and the poisoned drink was presented to him. Soon he felt a consuming fire in his intestines. He cried: 'I am poisoned,' but did not utter the slightest complaint against his consort.... He demanded the most natural antidote, warm milk. They carried their hypocritical alarm so far as actually to procure him some, and it produced a violent sickness. Peter then flung himself on his bed in an exhausted condition.... It was not part of the plan of the murderers that the attempted poisoning should fail, and it is also very probable that the favourite had counselled his brother, before starting, not to return without a death-certificate in his pocket. Alexius was consequently very much embarrassed. But he very soon recovered himself. First he and his fellow-conspirators laid their heads together, and then they proceeded into the room where the Emperor lay. Orlov then stepped up to him and seized him by the neck. When, however, the Prince sprang up, scratched him in the face and said: 'What have I ever done to you?' Alexius let go and quitted the room. At the commotion caused thereby, the surgeon rushed into the room and remained in the doorway, stupefied at what he beheld. One of the two guardsmen then came running up and expelled the surgeon from the room. Lüders thereupon went out on the terrace where several people were assembled, and from whence the agitation of Alexius Orlov could plainly be seen, he was running about wildly, apparently unconscious of what was going on around him. The terrace, moreover, commanded a full view of the Emperor's room. Teplov, the younger Bariatinsky and Gregory Orlov may be regarded as simply witnesses of the murder, unless both the participators and the spectators of such deeds be not rather equally guilty. The other five were actually murderers.... They began by throwing the Prince on the bed again and attempted to smother him with the pillows, because this manner of

death would have left little or no marks of violence upon him. But, on the one hand, this method was too gradual, and, on the other, the fury of utter despair gave such incredible strength to the unfortunate Prince that it was impossible to kill him this way. They therefore tore him from the bed and flung him into an arm-chair. For some minutes they dragged him about the room in this chair, from which he made repeated efforts to rise. Finally, they flung him to the ground. Here the miserable wretch still struggled for his life with the monsters . . . but at last he was obliged to yield to their superior force and he had no other means of assistance left him but his voice. A man who happened to be in the adjoining room with the cabinet-courier, declared that they had never heard so terrible a cry as that of the Emperor.[1] Bariatinsky now took a napkin, made a noose in it and flung it round the neck of the helpless Prince. The murderers now had their victim down, and while they held his hands and feet tightly, knelt upon his breast and trod on his body. Engelhardt drew the noose so violently that the grandson of Peter I. speedily expired.

". . . Peter died on July 17, 1762, between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon, aged 34 years and some months.[2]"

[1] Peter's terrible cry seems to be the one disengageable fact in this lurid and imaginative narrative. Bolotov *(Zapiski)* who heard about the Emperor's death in due course and believed it to be natural, is careful to inform us, nevertheless, that Peter in his last illness (and what Bolotov heard must have been the talk of the whole town), screamed terribly. We may be quite sure that the murderers, whoever they were, would take good care that none but themselves were in at the death, but they could not prevent their victim's screams from being heard by the sentries outside.

[2] A translation of pp. 160—169, of Band II. of "Biographie Peters des Dritten."

III

HERRMANN'S NARRATIVE

E. Herrmann in *Geschichte des russischen Staats*, follows Helbig's narrative verbatim, omitting his reflections and comments.

IV

CASTERA'S NARRATIVE

"The death of the ill-fated Emperor was resolved upon. When he was conveyed from Petershoff, the Prince, restored to confidence by the promises of Panin, little apprehended the fate which awaited him. Believing that his confinement was to be short, previous to his being sent back to Germany, he preferred a request to Catherine to have the negro who sometimes amused him, a dog of which he was very fond, a bible and some romances, and desired she might be told that, disgusted with the wickedness of men, he was determined henceforth to live the life of a philosopher. Not one article was granted him, and his plans of wisdom were laughed to scorn. They did not even carry him to the imperial castle of Robscha [sic], as had been announced to him; he was secretly conducted to Mopsa, a small country house belonging to the Hetman, Razumoffsky. He had been six days in this place without its being suspected by anyone but the ringleaders of the conspiracy and the soldiers who guarded him, when Alexius Orloff and Teploff appeared and told him they came to intimate his approaching deliverance and to ask a dinner of him. There were immediately introduced, conformably to the custom of the North, glasses and brandy. While Teploff was endeavouring to answer the Czar, Orloff fills the glasses and mingles that which was to carry death

into the bowels of the Prince, with an infusion which one of the court physicians had the villainy to compound on purpose. The Czar, suspecting no harm, took the poison and swallowed it. He was presently seized with agonizing pains, and on Orloff's presenting him a second glass, he rejected it, and upbraided him with the brutal crime he had committed. He screamed aloud for milk, but the two monsters again presented poison to him and pressed him to take it. A French *valet de chambre*, who was powerfully attached to his master, ran in. The Czar flung himself into his arms, saying: 'It was not enough then to prevent my reigning over Sweden, and to tear from my head the crown of Russia! they must have my life besides!' The *valet de chambre* had the boldness to intercede for his unhappy master, but the two abandoned villains forced this dangerous witness out of the apartment and continued to abuse the Czar. In the midst of this tumult entered the youngest of the Princes Bariatinsky, who commanded the Guard. Orloff, who had already thrown down the Czar, pressed upon his chest with his own knees, holding him fast at the same time by the throat with all his force, while the other hand grasped his skull. Bariatinsky and Teploff then passed a table-napkin with a sliding-knot round his neck. Peter, in defending himself, imprinted a scratch on the face of Bariatinsky, the mark of which that traitor had many days afterwards, but the struggle of the unfortunate Czar was soon exhausted, and the murderers accomplished the work of death by strangling him.

"Alexius Orloff immediately mounted on horseback and galloped off at full speed to inform Catherine that Peter had breathed his last. He arrived at the moment when she was going to hold her Court. She appeared with a composed air; afterwards she closetted herself with Orloff, Panin, Razumoffsky, Gleboff, and some other of her fell confidants;

and after having deliberated in this ill-omened council, to determine whether it would be proper immediately to inform the Senate and people of the Emperor's decease, it was agreed to wait one day more. Catherine dined in public as usual, and met her Court in the evening with all imaginable gaiety.[1]"

V

DASHKOVA'S NARRATIVE

"But amidst speculations which these interesting events excited, my thoughts were suddenly turned to a dreadful reality which petrified me with consternation and horror: I allude to the tragic end of Peter III.! I was so shocked at the news of this catastrophe, so indignant at such a winding-up of this glorious revolution, that although I spurned the idea of the Empress being, in any degree, an accomplice in the crime of Alexius Orlov, I could not bring myself to enter the palace until the following day. I then found the Empress with a dejected air, visibly labouring under much uneasiness of mind. These were her words when she addressed me: 'My horror at this death is inexpressible; it is a blow which strikes me to the earth.'— 'It is a death too sudden, madam,' replied I, 'for your glory and for mine.'

"No other subject dwelt upon my thoughts, and I had what was called the imprudence to say, in the course

[1] History of Catherine II., by J. Castera. Translated from the French by Henry Hunter, pp. 209—211. London, 1800. Castera's tissue of falsehoods was for long regarded, especially by Catherine's enemies, as a document of great value. As a matter of fact it contains almost more blunders (and that of the most glaring description) than the number of sentences fairly admits of.

of the evening, while speaking in the antechamber before a number of persons, that I trusted Alexius Orlov would feel now more than ever that we were not formed to breathe even the same atmosphere together, and that I had pride enough to believe he would not dare in future to approach me, even as an acquaintance. From this day all the Orlovs became my implacable enemies; and as for Alexius, in spite of his natural insolence, I must do him the justice to say, that twenty years afterwards elapsed without his once presuming to address a word to me on any occasion.

"Whoever has the wickedness to suspect the Empress of having directed, or even connived at, the murder of her husband, will find an absolute proof of the injustice of these suspicions in a letter, still existing, which she received from Alexius Orlov, written in his own hand, a few moments after the horrible deed had been perpetrated. Its style and incoherence mark strongly, in spite of his drunkenness, the terror and wildness of his apprehensions, while he solicits pardon for the act in the most supplicatory language.

"This important letter[1] was preserved, with great care, by Catherine II., amongst other documents of consequence, in a casket, which at her death, by order of Paul, her successor, Prince Bezborodko was appointed to examine and to read the papers it contained in his presence. When he had finished reading this letter of Alexius Orlov, Paul, making the sign of the Cross, exclaimed: 'God be praised! the few doubts I had on this subject relative to my mother are now dissipated.'[2] The Empress and Mdlle. Nelidoff were present, and it was commanded by the Emperor that it should be read also to the Grand-Dukes and to Count Rostopstschin.[3]"

[1] A full translation of the letter will be found on pp. 170/171.

[2] Memoirs of the Princess Daschkow. Edited from the originals by Mrs. W. Bradford. London, 1840. Vol. I., pp. 107—108.

[3] See note 3 on p. 171 supra.

VI

SALDERN'S NARRATIVE

"The firmness of this general (*i.e.* Marshal Münnich) deeply disquieted Catherine II. and the reflection that he might discover the retreat of the Emperor and afterwards deliver him without much difficulty, terrified her to such a degree that she gave orders that Peter III. should be transported to Archangel; but, according to all appearances, it may be taken as proved that those of the conspirators who sought him out in his prison, under the pretext of thus removing him, were charged to assassinate him. It is vain that, to attenuate the horror of this most infamous act, the partisans of the Empress have declared that she simply ordered her husband to be transported to Archangel. . . The great distance of the place whither it is pretended Peter was to have been conducted and the little security obtainable there, compared (with what he would have had) at Schlüsselburg, which was close at hand, prove that the Empress had the intention of making her husband disappear from the world, for so long as he existed she was forced every moment to tremble for her own life.

"Eight of the most determined of the conspirators, among whom were the three brothers Orlov, one of their cousins, commonly called 'little Orlov,' a prince Bariatinski, and a certain Toepelhof [*i.e.* Teplov], repaired on July 6 [sic], old style, to the house where the Emperor was confined and presented some poison to him. The prince refused to taste it, declaring that nothing would decide him to terminate his life in this manner. Upon his refusal, these infamous scoundrels overwhelmed him with blows and outrages. Peter III. defended himself with much courage, but feeling that it would be impossible for him to resist eight vigorous bandits for any length of time,

he rushed out of the room in order to seek safety in flight. But it was in vain. The assassins cried to the sentinel outside to fire upon him, which he did, the bullet, however, going too high to hit him (the hole made by the bullet is still to be seen over the door of the first room), whereupon the conspirators ran after the Prince, seized him and brought him back into the room where this horrible scene had begun. There they threw a handkerchief round his neck, struck him so violently that he fell to the ground, and finally succeeded in throttling him.

"Thus it was that a Prince full of gentleness and humanity fell beneath the blows of unnatural murderers. . . According to the confession of one of these assassins, this horrible enterprise was so pathetic, that their chief and principal director, Orlov, the favourite of the Empress,[1] could not remain a witness of the end of this tragedy. This personage departed from the house at the moment when the sentinel had fired his musket, exclaiming: 'I cannot stand it!' and did not come back till Peter III. had rendered up his last sigh.

"This same eye-witness also declares that little Orlov and Prince Bariatinski were the most furious of the lot, and that it was they who strangled and assassinated the Emperor.

"After this atrocious act had been accomplished the eight assassins despatched Alexius to the Empress, to inform her that on their arrival at the Emperor's, they found him attacked by a violent hemorrhoidal colic and that his life was in great danger. On hearing this she sent her chief physician to Robeak [sic] with orders to give the invalid all imaginable assistance. The doctor, imposed upon by this mendacious affectation of sympathy, hastened to his destination, where

[1] Gregory Orlov the favourite was, as we have seen, with the Empress, at Petersburg, the whole time.

he found Peter III. dead, and perceived very clearly the nature of the malady to which he had succumbed. But they imposed the most profound silence upon him, so that he thought it as well not to break the news even to the Empress herself. When, then, on his return, the Princess asked him how her husband had died, he said nothing, but drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and suspending it to his neck and twisting it several times, remarked: *Like that and that and that!* whereupon Catherine II. retired without opening her mouth.[1]"

VII

CATHERINE'S ACCOUNT OF THE REVOLUTION, CONTAINED IN HER LETTER OF 2 AUG. 1762, TO STANISLAUS PONIATOWSKI[2]

"... It is six months ago since my accession to the throne was first put in hand. Peter III. had lost the little wit he had. He ran his head against everything. He wanted to break up the Guards, and with that intent led them out to war; he meant to substitute for them the Holstein troops which were to have remained in town. He wanted to change his religion, marry Elizabeth Vorontsov and shut me up.

"The day of the celebration of the peace [with Prussia],

[1] Translated from *Historie de la Vie de Pierre III.*, par M. de Saldern. Metz, 1802, pp. 102—107. The whole passage bristles with palpable inaccuracies. The book was evidently written by a fanatical hater of Catherine II. I am strongly of opinion that the putative author, M. de Saldern, never wrote a word of it.

[2] This letter is a valuable document, written, as it was, on the spur of the moment by Catherine, only a fortnight after the murder, when all the facts were fresh in her memory, to an intimate friend to whom she could afford to be frank.

after having publicly insulted me at table, he ordered my arrest the same evening. My uncle, Prince George, got this order retracted, and from thenceforth I lent an ear to the propositions which had been made to me [ever] since the death of the Empress [Elizabeth].

"The [original] design was to seize him in his apartments and shut him up as was done with the Princess Anne and her children. He went off [however] to Oranienbaum. We were sure of a great number of the captains of the Guards. The fate of the secret was in the hands of the three brothers Orlov. . . . They are extremely determined people and much beloved by the common soldiers, having served in the Guards. I am under great obligations to these people, all Petersburg is my witness.

"The minds of the Guards were made up and at last 30 to 40 officers and 10,000 of the common soldiers were in the secret. There was not a traitor to be found among them during the three weeks [before the revolution], there were four separate parties among them, whose chiefs met together as an executive; the real secret was in the hands of the three brothers. Panin wanted [there volution] to be in favour of my son, but they would not consent anyhow.

"I was at Peterhof, Peter III. was making merry and dwelling at Oranienbaum. It had been agreed that in case of treason, his return should not be awaited, but the Guards were to be assembled and myself proclaimed. Their zeal for me did what treason might have done. On the 27th [July, O. S.] a report spread among the troops that I was arrested. The soldiers began to stir, one of our officers calmed them. Then a soldier went to a captain called Passek, chief of one of the [four] parties, and told him that it was certainly all up with me, he assured him he had news [to that effect] from me. This soldier, alarmed about me, then went to another officer, who was not in the secret, and told

him the same thing. Alarmed to hear that an officer had sent away this soldier without arresting him, he posted off to his major. The major caused Passek to be arrested—and the whole regiment was instantly agog. The report [of this affair] was sent the same night to Oranienbaum. All our conspirators were alarmed. They immediately resolved to send the second brother Orlov to me to bring me into town, and the other two [Orlovs] secured the town, telling everybody I was coming.

"The Hetman [Razumovsky], Volkonsky and Panin were in the secret. I was sleeping calmly at Peterhof at 6 o'clock in the morning of the 28th [July O. S.] The day had been a very disturbing one for me as I knew all that was going on. [Suddenly] Alexius Orlov enters my room and says quite gently: 'It is time to get up; all is ready for your proclamation.' I demanded some details. 'Passek is arrested,' said he. I hesitated no longer. I dressed myself quickly without making my toilet and got into the carriage which he had brought with him. Another officer, dressed up as a valet, was at the carriage door, a third met us some versts from Peterhof.

"Five versts from the town I met the elder Orlov with the younger Prince Bariatinsky. Orlov gave up his carriage to me, for my horses were done up, and we got out at the barracks of the Ismailovsky Regiment. [At the gates] were only twelve men, and a drummer, who began sounding an alarm, when the soldiers came running out, kissing me, embracing my hands and feet and clothes, and calling me their deliverer. Two of them brought a priest along with the cross. Then they began swearing allegiance to me. When this had been done, they begged me to get into the carriage, and the priest, cross in hand, walked on in front. We went [first] to the [barracks of the] Semenovsky Regiment, but the regiment came marching

out to meet us, crying, Vivat! Then we went to the church of Kazan, where I got out. Then the Preobrazhensky regiment arrived, crying, Vivat! 'We beg your pardon,' they said to me, 'for being the last. Our officers stopped us, but here are four of them whom we have arrested to shew you our zeal. We want what our brothers want.' Then the horse-guards arrived frantic with joy, I never saw anything like it, weeping and crying at the deliverance of their country.... I went to the new Winter Palace where the Synod and the Senate were assembled. A manifesto and a form of oath were hastily drawn up. Then I went down and received the troops on foot. There were more than 14,000 men, guards and country regiments. As soon as they saw me they uttered cries of joy which were taken up by an innumerable crowd. I went on to the old Winter Palace to take [my] measures and finish [the business]. There we took counsel together, and it was resolved to go to Peterhof, where Peter III. was to have dined with me, at their head. All the great roads had been occupied and rumours came in every moment.

"I sent Admiral Talisin to Cronstadt [to secure that fortress]. [Then] the Chancellor Vorontsov arrived to reproach me for my departure [from Peterhof]: they took him off to church to swear him in. Prince Trubetskoi and Count Shuvalov also arrived from Peterhof in order to collar the regiments and kill me. They were taken off to swear the oaths without the least resistance.

"After having sent off our couriers and taken every precaution, towards 10 o'clock in the evening I put on a uniform of the Guards. Having been proclaimed Colonel, with inexpressible acclamations, I took horse and we left only a very few of each regiment behind to protect my son, whom we left in town. I set out at the head of the troops, and we marched all night towards Peterhof. On reaching

a little monastery on the way, the Vice-Chancellor arrived with a very flattering letter from Peter III. I had forgotten to say that on leaving town, three soldiers of the Guards, sent from Peterhof to distribute a manifesto among the people, came to me and said: 'Here! take what Peter III. has entrusted us with, we give it to you. We are very glad of the opportunity of joining our brethren.'

"After the first letter came a second, the bearer whereof, General Michal Ismailov, threw himself at my feet and said: 'Do you take me for an honest man?' On my replying, 'Yes!' 'Well' says he, "it is pleasant to have to do with sensible folk. The Emperor offers to resign. I will bring to you [a form of abdication] after a very few alterations. I will save my country from a civil war without any difficulty.'

"I charged him with this commission, and off he went to accomplish it. Peter III. abdicated, at Oranienbaum, in full liberty, surrounded by 5000 Holsteiners, and came with Elizabeth Vorontsov, Gudovich and Ismailov to Peterhof, where, to protect his person, I gave him five officers and some soldiers.... Thereupon I sent the deposed Emperor to a remote and very agreeable place called Ropsha, 25 versts from Peterhof, under the command of Alexius Orlov, with four officers and a detachment of picked, good-natured men, whilst decent and convenient rooms were being prepared for him at Schlusselburg. But God disposed otherwise. Fear had given him a diarrhœa which lasted three days and passed away on the fourth; in this [fourth] day he drank excessively, for he had all he wanted except liberty. Nevertheless, the only things he asked me for were his mistress, his dog, his negro and his violin; but for fear of scandal [sic] and increasing the agitation of the persons who guarded him, I only sent him the last three things.

"The hemorrhoidal colic which seized him affected his

brain; two days he was delirious, and the delirium was followed by very great exhaustion, and despite all the assistance of the doctors, he expired whilst demanding a Lutheran priest. I feared that the officers might have poisoned him, so I had him opened, but it is an absolute fact that not the slightest trace of poison was found inside him. The stomach was quite sound, but inflammation of the bowels and a stroke of apoplexy had carried him off. His heart was extraordinarily small and quite decayed. . . .

"It would take a whole book to describe the conduct of each of the leaders. The Orlovs brilliantly distinguished themselves by their faculty of ruling the minds of men, by their prudent audacity, by [their attention to] great and petty details, and by their presence of mind. They have a great deal of common-sense and generous courage. They are enthusiastic patriots, very honest folk, passionately attached to my person and united as never brothers were united before. There are five of them in all, but only three were here. . . . The Princess Dashkof, younger sister of Elizabeth Vorontsov, though she would like to attribute to herself all the honour [of the affair], being acquainted with some of the chiefs, was looked upon askance because of her parentage, and being but 19 had no authority at all, and although she pretends that she was the chief intermediary all along, yet the real fact is that everyone had been in [direct] communication with me six months beforehand, before she even knew their names. But she has a meddlesome humour together with a great deal of ostentation, and our principal men hate her exceedingly. It was only a few feather-brains who let her into the secret and told her all they knew, which was very trumpery. Nevertheless, they say that Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov, the lowest and most cowardly of men, has written to Voltaire that a woman, 19 years old, has changed the government of this Empire.

I beg of you to undeceive this great writer. Five months before she knew anything it was necessary to conceal from the Princess Dashkov [the nature of] the modes of communication between myself and others, and during the last four weeks she was told as little as possible.

"The strength of mind of Prince Bariatinsky, who concealed the secret from his dearly beloved brother, the late Emperor's adjutant... deserves praise.

"In the Horse-Guards, an officer named Chitrov, aged 22, and an under officer, 17 years old, named Potemkin, directed everything with discernment, courage and energy.

"That is pretty much the history of this affair and I assure you that everything was done under my direct personal orders. At the last moment I hurried up because the departure [of the Emperor] for the country prevented the execution [of the plot], and everything had been ripe for a fortnight.

"The late Emperor, when he heard of the tumult in town, was prevented by the young women of his suite from following the advice of old Field Marshal Münnich, who advised him to throw himself into Cronstadt, or set off for the army with a few followers. When he *did* go in his galley to Cronstadt the fortress was already ours in consequence of the good conduct of Admiral Talizin, who caused General Devier to be disarmed, this Devier being already on the spot on the Emperor's behalf when Talizin arrived. An officer of the port, on his own initiative, threatened to fire point-blank at the galley of this unfortunate Prince.

"At last, then, God has brought everything to pass according to His predisposition. The whole thing is rather a miracle than a fact foreseen and arranged beforehand, for so many felicitious combinations could not have coincided unless God's hand had been over it all.

"... Be assured, too, that hatred of foreigners was the

leading principle of the whole affair, and that Peter III. himself passed for a foreigner.

"Adieu, there are some very strange situations in this world.[1]"

VIII

NARRATIVE OF THE FRENCH CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, BERANGER

"The death of the late Emperor, a week after the catastrophe, rivets the attention of most people here. It is declared quite publickly that it is the natural result of the despair caused by his deposition, but in secret people say that they don't believe this at all, but that he was poisoned. I cannot speak affirmatively, my Lord, as to this, but I have everything which might justify the most violent suspicions.

"Certain persons, who saw Peter III. at the moment of his departure from Peterhof, assure me that he was composed and in good health; that this Prince, having little genius or sensibility, had never been the prey of any grief, and that the colic with which he is said often to have been attacked was an idea invented to account for his end.

"It is even said, my Lord, that this Prince dined as usual on the day of his death, and that on rising from table he was attacked by very sharp and violent pains and that he himself said he was going to die.... It is said, my Lord, that the Empress did not know of the death of Peter III. till twenty-four hours afterwards. The tidings were conveyed to her while she was at table. She [then] went into a side chamber with two or three of her confidants. She has only

[1] The French original of this very hastily written and somewhat incoherent letter, which I have somewhat abridged, will be found in Bilbasov: *Istorya Ekaterinui Vtoroi*, Vol. II., pp. 509—517.

appeared in public a very little since then and has forgotten nothing whereby she may impress her Court with the grief and affliction which this event has caused her.... What a picture, my Lord, for a nation coming to its sober senses and judging coolly! On the one hand, the grandson of Peter I. dethroned and put to death; on the other hand, the grandson of Czar Ivan languishing in irons, whilst a Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst usurps the crown after a preliminary regicide to clear the way to the throne.

"Before the Revolution, the conspirator Passeck [sic] had frequently proposed to the Empress to assassinate the Emperor. She would never consent to this. I do not suppose that the heart of the Princess is so atrocious that she could have had a hand in the death of the Czar; but inasmuch as the most profound mystery will, in all probability, for ever conceal from public knowledge the real author of the horrible crime, the Empress who profits directly by it will always be the object of odious suspicions.

"So many people, many of them bad characters overwhelmed with debt and of no reputation, contributed to bring about this Revolution, that it is very probable that one of them may have committed this outrage without the participation of this Princess, in order either to provide for his own personal safety, or perhaps in the belief that he would thereby win her favour....[1]

"*St. Petersburg*, July 23, 1762."

[1] Abridged from the French original in Bilbasov: *Istoriya Ekaterinui Vtoroi*, Vol. II., pp. 560—563.

INDEX

A

Adadurov (Vasily), 19.
Adolphus Frederick, *King of Sweden*, 6.
Alinius, *Fraulein*, 6.
Almadovar, *Marquis d'*, 59, 61, 62.
Ambrosius, *Archbishop of Novgorod*, 15.
Anne, *Duchess of Holstein*, death, 1; character, 2, 10.
Anne, *Empress of Russia*, 5.
Anne, Leopoldovna, 174.
Augustus III., *King of Poland*, 57.

B

Bariatinsky (Ivan) *Prince*, Mission to Cronstadt, 157—8.
Bariatinsky (Theodor) *Prince*, 147, 171, 172.
Bauer, *General*, 48.
Béranger, *Chargé d'affaires*, 140; his account of the Revolution of 9 July, 1762, 198—9.
Bergholtz, *Lieut.*, 7, 9, 155.
Bernstorff, *Count*, 115.
Bestuzhev (Alexius), *Count*, 12, 18, 23, 32, 37, 44, 57, 131.
Bibikov (Vasily), 147.
Bilbasov, "*Istorya Ekaterinui Vtoroi*", xv—xvi; 146, 155, 156, 158, 159, 161, 164, 165, 166, 167, 170, 172.
Biren (Ernst Johan), 43—44, 72, 88, 97.
Bolotov, "*Zapiski*", x; 46, description of peace-festivities, 74—5; anecdotes of the new drill, 93—4; descriptions of Peter's orgies, 102; and pastimes, 103; 106, 107.
Boscamp, 85.
Bredikhin, *Captain*, 137.
Breteuil, *Baron de*, 59; Peter's violence towards, 61—2; recalled to Paris, 80; 130, 140, 143.
Bruehl, *Count*, x, 57, 103, 109.
Brummer, brutality to Peter, 6; 8.
Budberg, *Baron*, 145.
Buturlina, *Countess*, 31.
Bute, *Earl of*, 66, 70, 71.

C

Castera, "*History of Catherine II.*", 185—7.
Catherine I., *Empress of Russia*, 3.
Catherine II., *Empress of Russia*, "*Mémoires*" xiii; arrival in Russia, 1744, 18; serious ill-

ness, 19—20; received into orthodox church, 20; wedding, 20—22; early married life, 25—29; coldness towards husband, 31; at death-bed of Elizabeth, 35; treatment of Prince Ivan, 99; impotence, 123; tries to gratify Peter, 124; well-treated by him, 124—5; attitude towards her husband's mistress, 127; insulted by Peter, 127—8; correctness of her public conduct, 129; profoundly discouraged, 130; plots against Peter, 130—131; ingratitude towards Dashkova, 136—7; *liaison* with Orlov, 139; goes to Oranienbaum, 144—146; brought to Capital by A. and G. Orlov, 147; acclaimed Empress, 149—9; manifesto of accession, 150; reviews her troops, 150—1; marches against Peter, 152; interview with Chancellor Vorontsov, 154; rejects Peter's offer of compromise, 161; accepts Peter's abdication, 161—62, 164; what is she to do with Peter? 167; her embarrassment, 168; 173, 174; Catherine's own account of the Revolution, 191—98.

Charles XI., *King of Sweden*, 3.

Charles XII., *King of Sweden*, 1, 3, 4, 5.

Charles Frederick, *Duke of Holstein*, 1, poverty and extravagance, 2; character, 3.

Charles Peter Ulric, *Duke of Holstein; see* Peter III.

Cherekovskaya (Ekaterina), 139.

Chernuishev, *Count*, diplomatic activity at Paris, 79—81.

Chernuishev (Zachary), *Count*, 57. 58, 78.

Choiseul, *Duc de*, 79, breaks off diplomatic relations with Russia, 80.

Colloredo, *Count*, 77.

Courland, *Princess of*, 26.

D

Dashkov (Mikhail Ivanovich), *Prince*, 135.

Dashkova (Ekaterina Romanovna) *Princess*, "*Memoirs*", x—xi; 31, 97, 103, early career and character, 135—6; Catherine's ingratitude towards, 136; her services to Catherine, 137—8, 140; accompanies Catherine to Peterhof, 152; 164, 169, "*Memoirs*", 187—8.

Devier, *General*, mission to Cronstadt, 157—8; arrest, 159.

Devonshire, *Duke of*, 70.

Dueben, *Count*, 64.

Duecker, *Count*, *See* Peter III.

E

Ekeblad, *Count*, 113.

Elizabeth, *Empress of Russia*, 2, 7, 8; kindness to Peter, 9; no scholar, 10; 11, 13, fine dancer, 14; 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 30, 32, 33, last illness and death, 33—39; 54, 88, 132, 165, 169.

F

Felton, 140.
Finckenstein, von, 119.
Fontenay, *Admiral*, 119.
Frederick II., *King of Prussia*, "*Politische Correspondenz*", XIII; 18, 32, 33, 51, desperate situation in 1762, 53—4; Elizabeth's death his salvation, 54; reception of Gudovich, 55; reopens diplomatic relations with Russia, 55; 58, 64, 65, 67, 68, fulsome flattery of Peter III., 68—69; fury at the Golitsuin despatch, 70; gratitude to Peter, 71; treaty with Russia, 72; 81, arbitrates between Russia and Denmark, 83—84; incites the Porte against Austria, 85—86; a standing menace to Russia, 87; 98, Peter III.'s infatuation for, 108—9; favours Peter III.'s anti-Danish policy, 115—116; warns Peter against the Russians, 117; arbitrates between Russia and Denmark, 118—19; 120, 134, urges Peter to remain in Russia, 142.
Frederick V., *King of Denmark*, 113, 116.
Frederick, *King of Sweden*, 5.
Frederick William I., *King of Prussia*, 6.

G

George, *Prince of Holstein*, 59, 72, 79, 80, 84, 108, made Field-marshal, 108; 114, 128, 142, 151.
Glinsky, "*Tsarskiya Dyetui*", XIV.
Glyebov (Alexander Ivanovich), character, 38; 39, 41, 92, 133.
Golitsuin (Aleksyei Mikhailovich), *Prince, Vice-Chancellor*, despatches from London, 1762, 66—67, 68—9; 70, 74, 80, 90, appointed Vice-Chancellor, 143, 144; conveys Peter's letter of surrender to Catherine, 161—62; 183.
Golitsuin (Dmitry Mikhailovich), *Prince*, 76.
Golitsuin (Ivan Federovich), *Prince*, 153.
Goltz, *Baron* von, *Prussian Ambassador*, sent to St. Petersburg, 55; arrival there, 64; honours heaped upon, 64; 65, 69, 71, mediates between Russia and Denmark, 82—83; 85, 88, 90, 91, 92, 115, 142, 153, 157, 158, 160.
Gudovich (Andrei), *Baron*, mission to Frederick II., 54—55; 85, 89, 127, 128, 153, 154, 157, with Peter III. to Cronstadt, 159; 161, 164, arrested, 165.
Gyllenborg, *Count*, 29.

H

Hats, *Faction of*, 17.
Haxthausen, *Danish Minister*, XV, 114.
Helbig, "*Biographie Peters des Dritten*", XIV; 180, 184.
Herrmann (E.), "*Geschichte des russischen Staats*", X; 185.
Holberg (Ludvig von), *Baron*, 7.
Holm (Edvard), "*Danmark Norges Historie*", XIV—XV.
Holstein-Beck, *Prince of*, 128.
Hordt, *Colonel*, 60, 61.
Hosemann, *Pastor*, 7.

I

Ismailov, *General*, 153; conveys Peter's second letter to Catherine, 161; extorts Peter's abdication, 162.
Ismailov (M. L.), 156.
Ivan, *Prince*, Peter's kindness to, 97—99; 117.

J

Juel, *Dr.*, 7.

K

Kaunitz, *Prince*, 77, 78, 113.
Keith (Robert), *"Despatches"*, IX; 43, guards Prussian interests at St. Petersburg, 55; friendship with Peter III., 56—57, 58, 59, 61, 65, 70, mediates between Russia and Denmark, 82—3; 97, 109, 114—115, 123, 138, 143.
Khitrovo, 140.
Kihl, *Lieut.-Col.*, 166.
Knyphausen, 66, 70.
Korff (Nikolai von), *Baron*, 8, 81, 98, 106, 133.
Korff, von, *Ambassador*, 83.
Kostomarov, 156.
Kozlukov (Mikhail), 159.
Krause, *Madame*, 26.
Kurakina, *Princess*, 139.

L

Lacy (Peter), *Field-marshal*, 10.
Laudet, 14.
Lefort, *Baron*, 59.
Lestocq (Armand), 44, 97.
Lopukhina (Natalia), 26, 43.
Loverusky, 138.
Louis, *Admiral*, 144.
Louis XV., *King of France*, rupture with Russia, 79—80.
Lueders, *Dr.*, 166, 168, 170.

M

Maria Theresa, *Empress*, 57, 67, 78.
Mary, *Princess of Saxony*, 18.
Melgunov (Aleksyei Petrovich), character, 38, 92, 98, 153, 157.
Mercy d'Argenteau, *Count*, *"Despatches"*, IX; 40, 46, 52, 56, 57, disparaging account of Peter III., 58—59; over-punctiliousness, 59; boycotted at Court, 60; description of Peter's fracas with Breteuil, 61—62; criticism of Russian Peace Declaration, 63—4, 74, 78, 79, 104, 124, 127, 142.
Michel, *Prussian Minister*, 70.
Mikhailov (Aleksyei), 148.
Mitchell (Robert), 70.
Moltke, *Danish Minister*, 115.
Münnich (Burkhardt), *Field-marshal*, recall from banishment, 43—44, 88, 97; 142, counsels Peter to resist Catherine, 156—7; accompanies Peter to Cronstadt, 159—160, 161.

N

Narcisse, 166.
Narishkin (Leo Aleksyevich), 38, 92, 98, 153.
Neelov, *Colonel*, 155, 157.
Nepluyev (Ivan Ivanovich), 37.
Nummers, *General*, 157.

O

Obryezkov, diplomatic activity at the Porte, 85—6.
Odart, services to Catherine II., 139—140.
Olsufiev, *Secy.*, 35, 153.
Orlov (Aleksyei Gregorevich), 132, conveys Catherine II. to the capital, 147—148, 162, 164, conducts Peter III. to Ropsha, 166—7; frantic letter of remorse to Catherine, 170—171, 172.
Orlov (Gregory Gregorevich), 127, 129, 137, early career and character, 138—9; services to Catherine, 140; begins conspiring against Peter III., 146—7; takes Catherine to barracks of the Guards, 148—9; difficult position, 168—9; 171.
Orlov (Gregory Ivanovich), 139.
Orlov (Ivan Gregorevich), 139.
Orlov (Fedor Gregorevich), 139.
Orlov (Vladimir Gregorevich), 139.
Orshchin (Larion), 157.
Osterman (Andrei Ivanovich), *Count*, 88.

P

Panin (Nikita Ivanovich), *Count*, early career and character 131—33, 137, advises a conspiracy, 146, 149, wins Senate, and Synod for Catherine, 150; last interview with Peter III., 164; draws up proclamation of Peter's death, 173; advises exhibition of body, 173; persuades Catherine not to attend Peter's funeral, 174.
Passek, *Captain*, 137, arrest of, 144—5, 147.
Paul, *Grand-Duke* 30, birth, 32, 35, 110, 132, 133, 148, 149, 171—2, 175.
Paulsen, *Staff-Surgeon*, 170.
Peene, 18.
Peter I., *Emperor of Russia*, 1, 2, compared with Peter III., 105, 165.
Peter II., *Emperor of Russia*, 5.
Peter III., *Emperor of Russia*, birth, 1; early love of soldiering, 4; made a lieutenant, 4; early education, 4—5; brutality of his instructors, 6; goes to Russia, 8; reception at St. Petersburg, 9; personal appearance, 9; honours conferred upon, 10; education, 10—15; received into Orthodox Church, 15—17; illness 1743, 17—18; betrothal, 20; wedding, 20—

22; character, 23—5; early married life, 25—29; coldness towards wife, 31; initiation into affairs, 32, 33; at death-bed of Empress Elizabeth, 135; proclaimed Emperor, 39, 41, 42, Ukaz reducing salt-tax, 45; abolition of Secret Chancellery, 45; Ukaz enfranchizing nobility, 45; Ukaz of toleration 45; wise police measures, 46; popularity, 46—47; refuses golden statue, 47; febrile energy, 47—48; mode of life, 48—49; Ukaz secularizing church property, 50—51; re-opens diplomatic negotiations with Prussia, 54—5, 56, 57, indignation against Austria, 58; anger against French Minister, 59—60; scene at Court, 60—62; peace declaration of Feb. 13, 1762, 63—4; heaps honours on Prussian Minister, von Goltz, 64; infatuation for Frederick II., 68; correspondence with him, 69—70; Frederick's gratitude towards, 71; treaty with Frederick, 72; festivities in celebration of peace with Prussia, 73—75; rejects Austrian offered alliance against Denmark, 78; hostile attitude towards Denmark, 81—83; accepts mediation of Prussia, 83; oriental policy, 85—86; reverses Russia's traditional policy, 86—87, 90, 91, military reforms, 94—5; good qualities, generosity, 97; kindness to Prince Ivan, 98—9; conscientiousness, 99—100; reconstructs the fleet, 100; linguistic abilities and other accomplishments, 100—101; pastimes, 101—102; abstemiousness, 102—3; excitability, 103; lack of dignity, 104; buffoonery, 105; military mania, 106—107; costume, 108; infatuation for King of Prussia, 108—9; deterioration of character, 109; insults the Orthodox Church, 110; hostility to Denmark, 112—116; self-confidence, 117; accepts Prussia's mediation, 118, 120, begins Danish War, 121, 122, generosity to Catherine, 124—5; *liaison* with Elizabeth Vorontsova, 125—6; publicly insults Catherine, 127—8, 129, 134, warns Dashkova against Catherine, 136; plans for seizing him, 141; postpones coronation, 142; sets out for Oranienbaum, 143; disregards warnings of the conspiracy, 145—6; 152, proceeds to Peterhof to keep his name-day, 153; alarm at Catherine's departure, 154; first learns of Revolution, 155; counter-measures, 156—7, 158, attempts to get into Cronstadt, 159; abandons all hope, 160; first letter to Catherine, 161; abdicates unconditionally, 162; brought a prisoner to Peterhof, 163—4; removed to Ropsha, 165; residence there, 166—7; what is to be done with him? 167; illness, 170; and death, 170—2; death announced, 173; burial, 174.

Pieri, 101.

Pitt (William), 70.

Poniatowsky (Stanislaus), 139, 140.

Potemkin, 140.

Pushkin, *Lieut.*, 152.

R

Raümer, *"Beiträge zur neuern Geschichte"*, IX—X.
Razumovsky (Aleksyei), *Count*, 35, 42, 46.
Razumovsky (Cyril), *Count*, 42; sycophancy and absurdity, 93; intimacy with Peter, 133; goes over to Catherine, 134, 137, 138, 143, conspires against Peter, 146; heads the Guards in favour of Catherine, 148—149, 152.
Repnin (Vasily), *Prince*, 22.
Repnin (Nikolai Vasilevich), 73.
Rexin, *Prussian Minister*, political activity at the Porte, 84.
Romadanovsky (Fedor Yurevich), 165.
Roslavev, 137.
Rulhière, *"Histoire et anecdotes sur la Révolution de Russie* 1762", XI—XIII; 177—180.
Rumyantsev (Peter Aleksyeivich), *Count*, 119, 120, 121, 152, 157.

S

Saint-Petersburg, Treaty of, May 5th, 1762, 72—73.
Saint-Germaine, *General*, 121, 122.
Saldern (Caspar von), 84, character, 114; for peace with Denmark, 114—115, 119, *"Histoire de la Vie de Pierre III."*, 189—91.
Schumacher, *Danish Minister*, 167, 170.
Schwerin, *Count*, 72.
Sechnin (Dmitry), *Archbishop*, 50—51, 52.
Shakovsky (Yakov), *Prince*, 36—37, 41.
Shkurin, 147.
Shuvalov (Aleksander), *Count*, 41, 143, 153, 154—5.
Shuvalov (Ivan Ivanovich), *Count*, 35, 42; subaltern position, 90—91, 132, 152.
Shuvalov (Peter), *Count*, intrigues, 39; death, 40, 139.
Solovev, *"Istoria Rossii"*, XIII—XIV; 130.
Sophia Augusta Frederika, of *Anhalt-Zerbst, See* Catherine II.
Stehlin, *Prof.*, appointed Peter's Governor, character, 10; method of instruction, 11—14, 15, 17, 22, 101.
Stephen, *Archbishop of Pskov*, 15.
Stroganov, *Count*, 128.
Struve, *Dr.*, 9.
Suvorov (J. V.), 166.

T

Taluizin, *Admiral*, 157.
Teplov, 134, 150.
Theodorsky, 14, 19.
Trubetskoi (Nikita Yurevich), *Prince*, intrigues, 37; proclaims Peter III., 39, 40, 41, sycophancy, 93; absurdity, 94, 142, 153, takes oath of allegiance to Catherine, 154—5.
Tunler, 166.

U

Ulrica Leonora, *Queen of Sweden*, 1.
Ulrica Louisa, *Queen of Sweden*, 6, 70, 73.
Urusov, 94.

V

Vasilchikov, "*Semeistvo Razumovskikh*", xiv.
Veselovsky (Isaac), 14.
Villebois, *Field-marshal*, 133, 139.
Voeikov, *Major*, 145.
Volkonsky (Mikhail Nikitich), *Prince*, 133, 137, 146.
Volkov (Dmitry Vasilevich), character, 37, 38, 60, 77, political influence, 91—92, 153, 156.
Vorontsov (Ivan Larionovich), *Count*, 39, 41.
Vorontsov (Mikhail Larionovich), *Count*, *Grand Chancellor*, cowardice, 36, 57, 60, 61, 62, communicates imperial declaration to the Powers, 63—4; 72, 74, refuses to countenance Peter III.'s oriental policy, 85—86; character and helplessness, 89; honesty and patriotism, 90, 140, 144, 153, sent to reprimand Catherine by Peter III., 154.
Vorontsov (Roman Larionovich), *Count*, 39, 135, 153.
Vorontsova (Elizabeth Romanovna), *Countess*, 31, 39, 56, 92, character and description, 124—5, 153, 160, 161, 163, 164, 165.

W

Waliszewsky, "*Le Roman d'une Impératrice*", xv.
Werner, *General*, 85.

Z

Zadick (Aaron), 85.
Zagryazhka, *Countess*, 105.

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